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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Trauma and Transmutation in Spain:
A Study of Municipal Reactions to Outbreaks of Plague in Sixteenth Century Avila

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Jeno Kim

June 2017

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Prior to my first research trip, gathering relevant archival material seemed like an insurmountable task, but assistance from the archivists and staff at the *Archivo Municipal de Ávila*, *Archivo Histórico Provincial de Ávila*, *Biblioteca Nacional de España*, and *Archivo Catedralicio de Ávila* made the access to unpublished records a relatively painless process. As a novice researcher, I was unfamiliar with the formalities and protocols of archival research, particularly the ones from Spain. The archivists and staff, however, patiently assisted me with all the formal and informal procedures.

Segments of this dissertation have been presented at the Sixteenth Century Society & Conference, San Diego Spanish History Symposium, and UCR Graduate Conference on Epidemics. The valuable feedback that I received from delivering these conference papers made me question and reconceptualize broader theoretical presuppositions that I once held.

Living in a foreign country to conduct archival research, so I was told, can be a solitary, and at times lonely undertaking; however, I had the great fortune of meeting remarkable roommates and friends who made research trips to Madrid and Avila memorable. Alberto, Juanda, Daniel and Yeray graciously offered me a temporary home in Madrid as I searched for a more permanent living situation. Matt, Iñigo, Fanny, David, Wei, Kate, Leandro, Tamiris, Tharley, Grace, and Fern were equally as supportive for me in Avila. More importantly, their friendship and support made staying in a foreign country, which can be an isolated endeavor, quite pleasant.

Lastly, encouragement from my family was key to completing this dissertation. Special recognition goes to my cousin, Joon, who provided me with travel benefits. Without her aid, I would not have been able to make the multiple short-term research trips to Madrid and Avila. My brother, Simon, has been equally as supportive but in different ways. He skillfully picked apart and broke down the logic of one of my earlier arguments, and afterwards, he articulated a more cogent position with greater clarity. Most importantly, I would like to thank my mother, Olivia, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Olivia, who has worked so tirelessly with unconditional love to assure that my brother and I could have a better life in this country.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Trauma and Transmutation:
A Study of Municipal Reactions to Outbreaks of Plague in Sixteenth Century Avila

by

Jeno Kim

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, June 2017
Dr. Randolph C. Head, Chairperson

This dissertation examines municipal responses to a sequence of outbreaks of plague in sixteenth century Avila. News of the coming of an epidemic triggered a series of emergency public health measures, disrupted the normal patterns of daily life, and prompted residents to seek metaphysical forms of protection. Such preparations for and reactions to natural disasters were never uniform; rather, local authorities and residents handled and coped with the catastrophe in different ways from one epidemic to the next. The evidence in this dissertation demonstrates that the strategies used to limit mortality rates transmuted based upon evolving renaissance medical theories, restructuring of professional medical licensing program in the 1580s, and abnormal weather patterns. Similarly, contemporaneous European-wide Catholic religious reform efforts influenced the rearticulation of the signs and symbols of autochthonous spiritual traditions used to cope with the looming threat of death in Avila. While broader early modern medical and

religious changes swayed local responses to disasters, it was plague, as an external agent of historical change, that set these transformations in motion.

To date, no major study has examined the municipal and cultural reactions to a sequence of small-scale disasters in central Spain. This dearth in the literature can partially be attributed to the fact that for decades historians have gravitated towards analyzing the causes and consequences of larger catastrophic disasters such as the Black Death of the fourteenth century, which wiped out around half of Europe's population. This study differs from such works because it pays careful attention to the smaller recurrent episodes of plague that continued to reappear throughout Europe in a series of unpredictable waves throughout the early modern period. Rather than focusing the analysis on one large, cataclysmic event to understand cultural and social change, this dissertation analyzes a sequence of epidemics, and through such an analysis, a new type of local history, one which focuses on the transformative power of epidemics, can be written.

Using minutes from the council of Avila, records from the cathedral chapter, early modern medical treatises, and chronicles from sixteenth century Avila, this dissertation uncovers how and in what ways political, public health, and local spiritual traditions discourses transmuted with each epidemic.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
A Closer Theoretical Evaluation.....	7
Under the Shadow of the Black Death.....	10
Adversities and Accomplishments in Avila.....	16
Source Base.....	24
Chapter 1: Discourses of Dirtiness and Cleanliness: Rearticulating Jewish Identity in Avila (1480-1520)	31
The Creation of Avila’s “Hebrew Neighborhood” (1480s-1492).....	36
Chronicles of Cleanliness (1492-1607).....	47
The Legend of San Segundo and Avila’s Pure Christian Past (1517-1607).....	55
Conclusion.....	76
Chapter 2: Holy Objects and Wholly Healing: the Pestilence of 1519.....	79
Broadening the Scope of the Discussion: A Tale of Two Pandemics?.....	83
Alienating Contagious Bodies, Decontaminating Spaces, and Escaping Reality.....	96
Holy Objects that Heal: Desecrated Hosts and the Ancient Relics of San Segundo.....	118
Conclusion.....	137

Chapter 3: Fluid Discourses: Communication and Transmutation of Messages of Plague in the 1580s.....	134
Emergency Response Network(1560s-1590).....	138
Doctors for Hire: Royal Certifications that Pay.....	167
Mulberry Tree: A Health Hazard?	177
Conclusion.....	185
 Chapter 4: Fevers from the Fabric: The Burning of Contaminated Clothing in the Epidemic of 1597-1602.....	 187
“The Maltese Whore”: Contagious Discourses.....	191
Funding for the Fences; Privation for the Poor.....	206
Fire and Ice: Death from the Elements	219
Conclusion.....	240
 Conclusion.....	 243
Bibliography.....	247

ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	<i>Archivo Municipal de Ávila</i>
AHPA	<i>Archivo Histórico Provincial de Ávila</i>
AHN	<i>Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid</i>
ACA	<i>Archivo Catedralicio de Ávila</i>
BNM	<i>Biblioteca Nacional de España</i>

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines municipal, ecclesiastical, and public health responses to a series of outbreaks of plague in sixteenth century Avila.¹ Bubonic plague, caused by the bacterium *Yersinia Pestis*, is a highly lethal infection that causes the lymph nodes to swell, and can sometimes rupture. Prior to the standardized use of antibiotics in the early twentieth century, contracting plague often led to agonizing pain and eventual death for the victim. Since plague is also an easily transmittable zoonotic pathogen, outbreaks had exceptionally high mortality rates in the pre-industrial world.² For early modern Europeans, then, hearing news of coming of pestilence elicited fear, panic, and anxiety – sentiments which in turn triggered local governments and religious institutions to prepare for the imminent disaster. In sixteenth century Avila, city officials did not have a comprehensive, standardized set of procedures to respond to such events; rather, they drew on many methods to prevent and combat the effects of the epidemics, which varied from decade to decade. Fluctuating weather patterns, food shortages, directives from the monarch, internal administrative tensions, and changing theories on the etiologies of

¹Many scribes from sixteenth century Spain spelled names and places differently, even within the same document. To bypass any confusion and to maintain consistency, I use modern Spanish spelling for names of people. For places, I use anglicized spelling (e.g., Avila instead of Ávila), unless it is a quote or reference from a Spanish secondary source. All other words will retain their original sixteenth century spelling, including all its inconsistencies.

² For an overview of plagues in antiquity, see *Paleomicrobiology: Past Human Infections*, ed. Didier Raoult et al. (Heidelberg: Springer, 2008); For a comprehensive overview on the demographic effects of the Black Death, see Ole Benedictow *The Black Death 1346-1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004)

disease guided public health officials as they devised plans to check the lethal effects of the epidemic. The objective of this study is to analyze the discourses that shaped these responses to pestilence within the context of shifting views on medical theories, stereotypes towards minorities, and autochthonous spiritual traditions.³

To date, no study has thoroughly examined plague outbreaks in Avila nor the influence of evolving medical and religious discourses on Castile's public health practices at the local level. The absence of such disaster studies is partly due to the fact that scholars and non-academics have directed most of the attention towards larger, cataclysmic phenomenon, such as the Black Death of the fourteenth century, rather than to small-scale epidemics. As a result, our knowledge of the cultural and social effects of post-Black Death outbreaks of plague, which continued to occur regularly throughout Europe and Iberia in the late medieval and early modern period, is deficient.⁴ Although

³ William Christian suggested that most images and relics held special significance for the villages, towns, and cities from which these objects came. Each holy site and religious object then is tied to a local history and spiritual tradition. Christian's research investigated and analyzed the geographical heterogeneity of spirituality in sixteenth century. Peter Burke challenged this mode of analysis, stating that it scraps "one binary model, that of the elite and the people," and replaces it with a "center and periphery" model. Burke does offer a legitimate critique of Christian; however, Avila did in fact possess its own autochthonous religious traditions. Yet, aspects of local religious traditions in Avila were still part of a broader Early modern Spanish and European popular culture. See William Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Surrey: Ashgate, 1978) 12-13.

⁴ Although it mainly explores the northern regions of Spain, the most comprehensive examination of the demographic and economic impact of the epidemics of 1596-1602 is Bartolomé Bennassar's *Recherches sur les grandes épidémies dans le Nord de l'Espagne à la fin du XVI siècle* (Paris: La Haya, 1967). For a broad overview of epidemics in Navarre see Peio Monteano, *La Ira de Dios: Los Navarros en la era de la peste, 1348-1723*

they were smaller in terms of total fatality rates and geographical extent, sixteenth century outbreaks of plague still elicited the same psychological reactions as larger pandemics: anxiety, fear, and panic.⁵ These insecurities about impending doom disrupted social relations, stymied economic activity, and transformed spiritual practices, just as in larger pandemics. By analyzing a sequence of small-scale epidemics, a different type of local history can be written, one which strings together one natural disaster after the next to explicate the processes of historical transformation through the lens of disasters.⁶

This dissertation argues that each wave of plague disrupted existing spiritual practices of healing and secular public health policies in Avila. The processes of change that I examine did not always occur in a steady, gradual manner; rather, notable changes happened during and immediately after each epidemic. These sudden, unpredictable interruptions in daily life were recorded in municipal and ecclesiastical records, as well as

(Navarra: Pamiela, 2002); also see Vicente Pérez Moreda, "The plague in Castile at the end of the sixteenth century and its consequences," in *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I.A.A. Thompson et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the 1666 Plague of London, see Lloyd Moote and Dorothy Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London's Most Deadly Year*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); For Northern Italy, see Giulia Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year: The Social and Imaginary in Baroque Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁵ See Robin Torrence and John Grattan "The archaeology of disasters: past and future trends" in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶ This is not to suggest that disasters were moments when "true" culture or beliefs of a society suddenly emerged. Rather, disaster studies are simply another method through which historians can investigate the past and, perhaps, disentangle the complexity of the historical record.

the letters to and from the monarchs and his representatives. Through a synchronic analysis of the records from each epidemic, shifts in local attitudes towards catastrophes and approaches to disaster relief can be better understood from one epidemic to the next. In some instances, these transformations were long-lasting, in others, temporary, but what is important to recognize is that human and non-human actors facilitated this change, which reconfigured social relations and cultural interpretations of pestilence, disease, and contamination.

On a theoretical level, this dissertation draws on concepts from the Actor Network Theory. In its most basic sense, Actor Network Theory states that non-humans (such as plague) can possess agency.⁷ Bruno Latour, John Law, and Michael Callon, the principal architects of the theory, have expanded upon that basic principle, adding their own interpretations and constructing their own theoretical models since the late 1980s.⁸ Although this dissertation does not engage formally with refining Actor Network Theory, it can, according to the criteria set by Bruno Latour, still be classified as a work which expands, advances, and strengthens their theory. Latour proposed, “any study that gives

⁷ The classic work on the Actor Network Theory is Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). For a more concise, yet accurate, explanation of this theory, see John Law, “Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity,” *Systems Practice* 5 (1992): 379-393.

⁸ See Michel Callon, “Actor-Network Theory – The Market Test,” in *Actor Network Theory and After*, ed. John Law et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 181-195; Bruno Latour, “Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology Of a Door-Closer,” *Social Problems* 35 (1988): 298-310; John Law, *Organizing Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

non-humans a type of agency that is more open than the traditional natural causality – but more efficient than the symbolic one – can be part of our corpus.”⁹ Since the focal point of this dissertation is to analyze the dynamic relationships between non-human (plague, famine, blizzards) and human (priests, bishops, councilmen, physicians) actors in sixteenth century Avila, it is, in its most fundamental form, a work on Actor Network Theory.

Labelling nonhuman entities as agents of historical change is a point of contention for some social scientists.¹⁰ One of the main points of contention is the issue of intentionality. Critics of the Actor Network Theory contend that nonhumans lack volition and conscious action, and therefore cannot have agency.¹¹ In other words, natural occurrences (abnormal weather, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes) would not classify as an agent since these phenomena cannot make willful, conscious decisions.

⁹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

¹⁰ Harry Collins and Seven Yearley, “Epistemological Chicken,” in *Science and Practice and Culture*, ed. Andrew Pickering. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Olga Amsterdamska, “Surely, you must be joking, Monsieur Latour!” *Science, Technology and Human Values* 15 (1990): 495-504.

¹¹ In every professional presentation that I have delivered, the most common question that I received was: “how can plague have agency?” That question was usually followed by additional critiques: “plague cannot think; it cannot make choices.” Jeno Kim, “Catastrophe in Catholic Reformation Avila: Medieval Responses to the Plague Outbreak of 1519.” (paper presented at the annual meeting for Sixteenth Century Society & Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 16-19, 2014); *Ibid*, “Epidemic Disease and Spirituality in Sixteenth Century Avila” (paper presented at the UCR Epidemics and Society, Riverside, California, April, 2013).

Since *Yersinia Pestis* lacks the ability to make intentional choices, it would be problematic to consider it an agent of social and cultural change, according to some critics.

To address those critiques, I contend that plague, as a naturally occurring ecological entity, has the capability to disrupt social relations and cause societal change; human actors, on the other hand, interpret, react, and reconfigure what pestilence had broken down or unsettled. While multiple conceptions of the term agency exist, I adhere to the etymology of the term to avoid confusion.¹² The word agent, which comes from the Latin verb *agere*, means to “lead, drive, or conduct.” Thus, unconscious, naturally occurring phenomena – and even self-automated devices – can “lead, drive, and conduct” change. It is the dynamic relationship between human and nonhuman actors which has the potential to guide societal and cultural transformations.¹³

¹² See “Agency,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed June 5, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency>.

¹³ This is not to suggest that environment or geography are the dominant forces of social change. The most frequently cited example of environmental and geographical determinism is Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1997).

A Closer Theoretical Evaluation: Pandemics and Epidemics of Plague in late medieval and early modern Europe and Spain

For the past four decades, the question of the capacity and function of disease in effecting historical change has generated discussion among scholars in the social sciences and humanities. In his groundbreaking monograph *Plagues and Peoples* (1976), William McNeill offered a radical interpretation concerning the significance of micro- and macro-parasites and the transmission of diseases as the principal force of social and cultural change.¹⁴ Previous historical scholarship frequently categorized epidemics as “occasional disastrous outbreaks” which “remained sudden and unpredictable interruptions of the norm.”¹⁵ In contrast, McNeill conceptualized epidemics as “normal historical phenomena,” which dismantle and restructure social order in regular cycles.¹⁶ Pandemics, then, should not be interpreted as unexpected events that lay outside the standard model of historical interpretation; rather, the outcomes of conquest and colonization and the basic structures of everyday life were contingent upon the transmission and circulation of pathogens through insects, animals, and human-to-human interactions.¹⁷ As global networks of trade and the transfer of goods increased, African

¹⁴ William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Although McNeill’s monograph is often cited as the first work to stress that disease was a prevalent and sweeping force of historical change, Hans Zinsser was the first modern historical work to emphasize that “infectious disease” was “one of the great

and Eurasian disease pools crossed paths in the Mediterranean, spawning new pathogens. To put it simply, the history of mankind must be understood within the context of the myriad environmental factors that connect civilizations. Wherever humans travelled, traded, migrated, and battled, microbes followed alongside, keeping populations in check by disrupting social relations, and leaving a lasting imprint on collective social memories. McNeill's overarching theoretical perspective on epidemics shifted the mode of analysis away from "great men" and "watershed" moments in history and brought pathogens to the forefront of the discussion, where outbreaks and environmental forces alter webs of human interaction.

While McNeill's theories have provided historians and social scientists with an innovative interpretive framework, some historians of disease and medicine argue that diseases do not have such a pervasive role in human history, since they are social constructions. Since the 1970s historians of science and medicine began to focus their research on epidemics within social, cultural, and linguistic structures. These historians, in the words of John Arrizabalaga, contend that disease can only be interpreted and "fully understood in the precise socio-cultural context where it has been perceived."¹⁸ This school of thought, commonly known as the "socio-constructionist perspective," pins the virulence and mortality rates of epidemics and pandemics not on the microbe itself, but

tragedies of living things" in history. See Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934), 7.

¹⁸ Jon Arrizabalaga, "Problematizing Retrospective diagnosis in the History of Disease," *Asleepio* 54 (2002), 54.

on social conditions and the linguistic formulations of disease. According to this perspective, “disease,” “illness,” and “health,” are defined by institutions of authority and popular discourses, and are therefore concepts rooted in mental habits. In other words, the socio-constructionists suggest that microbes do not *directly* cause disarray to society. François Delaporte, an advocate of the socio-constructionist theory, suggested that “disease does not exist. It is therefore illusory to think that one can ‘develop beliefs’ about it to ‘respond’ to it.”¹⁹ For Delaporte, institutions of power classify, codify, and categorize what constitutes a disease. In his interpretation, pathogens are stripped of agency since societies have invented – and in some cases imagined – them into existence. Social scientists who adopt this viewpoint often direct the blame of the deadly consequences of epidemics on the irresponsibility and negligence of governments to remedy famine, poor diets, sanitation, social inequalities, or similar public health problems.²⁰

A more sophisticated and attractive theoretical stance appears in the work of J.N. Hays, who argued that disease was both objective reality and a social construct.²¹ Hays

¹⁹ Taken from James Patterson’s article “How do we Write the History of Disease?” *Health and History* 1 (1998): 6; François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: Cholera in Paris, 1832* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

²⁰ A notable monograph which examines the failures of public health policies is Richard Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²¹ J.N. Hays, *Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Responses in Western History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 4.

acknowledges the intrinsic lethality of pathogens and the devastating consequences of nature, which exist independently and outside of the realm of linguistic structures.

Equally, these pathogens are interpreted within cultural and social settings, meaning that institutions can define and redefine the microbes as pathogens or benign microorganisms.

To add to Hays' theoretical stance, I contend that these social constructions of disease are still part of a social reality. Even though medical organizations classify the nature of disorders, diseases, epidemics, and pandemics, societies collectively recognize the existence of these definitions, meaning that they are ontologically subjective.²²

Under the Shadow of the Black Death: A Historiographical Evaluation of Early Modern Plague Outbreaks

Beginning in the 1950s and 60s, historians recognized that studies on post-Black Death episodes of plague were conspicuously limited. The long-term impact of the Black Death on European society is unquestionable; however, most of the attention has focused

²² Here, I rely upon John Searle's understanding of social reality, which he has brilliantly articulated in his masterpiece *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). When using his classifications, social constructions of disease would be considered ontologically subjective. The pathogen itself is ontologically objective. Both the social construction and the physical bacillus are part of a social reality.

on its broader demographic²³ and economic effects.²⁴ The long-term psychological transformations of European religious culture as a result of the subsequent episodes of plague were largely unexamined by this time. In 1958, William Langer's famous address to the American Historical Association highlights the scarcity of research in the historiography:

None of the commentators, so far as I can see, have traced or determined the connection between the great and constantly recurring epidemics and the state of mind of much of Europe at that time. Yet this relationship would seem to leap to the eye. The age was marked, as all admit, by a mood of misery, depression, and anxiety, and by a general sense of impending doom.²⁵

²³ Calculating mortality rates of the Black Death poses numerous theoretical and methodological obstacles. As a result, historians continue to debate the catastrophic impact of the Bubonic Plague on the European population. Textbooks usually cite 1/3 of the population. Experts on the Black Death such as Ole Benedictow calculates as much higher rate of sixty percent. John Aberth critiqued Benedictow's methodology, and based on diocesan records in England, estimates that 40-60% mortality rates are more accurate. Ole Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353*; John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²⁴ See Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²⁵ William Langer, "The Next Assignment" *The American Historical Review* 63 (1958): 283-304.

Langer keenly observed that while studies have traced the history of flagellants, pogroms against Jews,²⁶ the Dance of Death in literature and art,²⁷ Malthusian deadlocks,²⁸ and a heightened attentiveness of the apocalypse, a study of the mentalities and lasting effects of post-Black Death episodes of plague were missing in the historiography.

After Langer's address to the AHA and with the emergence of the new social history, historians were more eager to investigate the mentalities, collective memories,

²⁶ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements* (New York: Harper, 1957).

²⁷ Anna Montgomery Campbell, *The Black Death and Men of Learning* (Columbia University Press, 1931); Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death: The Arts, Religion, and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951)

²⁸ Arguing from a Malthusian perspective, Michael Postan in 1950 contended that England hit a population ceiling in the early fourteenth century, and plague was a natural "check" to the unsustainable population growth. Since Postan's thesis, historians have challenged the integrity of a Malthusian interpretation of the Black Death. David Herlihy and Samuel Cohn most famously shifted the debate away from Malthusian framework since it did not sufficiently explain the emergence of plague nor did it account for the pathogenicity of the bacterium *Yersinia Pestis*. For Herlihy and Cohn, the Black Death had a lasting impact on pre-modern European society. Herlihy went so far as to argue that the scarcity of labor in the fourteenth century eventually led to the creation of the printing press as a labor-saving technology. Herlihy and Cohn contend that the Black Death caused a dramatic decline in overall population throughout Europe, impacting the cohesion of society, but that living standards and economic vitality of Europe experienced a marked improvement in the long run as a result. See Ole Benedictow, *What Disease was Plague? On the Controversy over the Microbiological Identity of Plague Epidemics of the Past* (Boston: Brill, 2010); David Herlihy, *The Black Death and Transformation of the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke offer a concise overview of debates concerning productivity and population. After assessing the data, they conclude that "the fifteenth century was one in which Europe experienced both an increase in its population and high living standards." See *Power and Plenty*, 117-120.

and experiential dimensions of late medieval society.²⁹ A masterpiece that has gained notable reputation is Philip Ziegler's *The Black Death*, which synthesized a wide range of scholarship and stressed human interactions vis-à-vis church and society.³⁰ By carefully examining accounts of penitential movements such as the flagellants, accusations against Jews for causing the pestilence, and the psychological dependence of men to the patron saints of plague, Ziegler identified key characteristics of the intellectual climate of late fourteenth century Europe.³¹ Expanding upon Ziegler's style of analysis, Samuel Cohn's *Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death* demonstrated that penitential and ascetic concerns were prevalent modes of thinking during the initial outbreak of bubonic plague in Central Italy. That is to say, people reacted, initially, through a series of personal, internalized spiritual and moral reflections. However, by the 1360s a key mental shift took place by which communities actively sought support from and relied upon religious institutions such as hospitals and confraternities. Cohn's brilliant style of analysis, which interprets patterns of transformations after each epidemic, has inspired segments of this dissertation.

²⁹ Even before the emergence of the New Social History, a handful of older studies traced the mentalities of late medieval society and plague such as Johan Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, translated by F. Hopman, (New York, 1924).

³⁰ Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009); David Nirenberg has a thorough analysis of the treatment of minorities in *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³¹ See "Modes of Thought and Feeling" in *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* by David Herlihy.

While our knowledge of the Black Death and its immediate aftermath in Western Europe is extensive and covers a wide-range of sub-disciplines, comprehensive studies on its effects on the Iberian Peninsula are conspicuously limited. The existing scholarship is mainly comprised of articles on provinces³² and chapters in general surveys of plague in Western Europe,³³ and a satisfactory overview of the effects of medieval (and even more of early modern) bubonic plague for the Iberian Peninsula is absent. Eminent historians have also commented on this deficiency. In 1969 Ziegler observed that “No major study of the Black Death in the Iberian Peninsula has yet been written.”³⁴ The same holds true in the twenty-first century, as Teofilo Ruiz, a preeminent historian of medieval Spain, affirmed in 2003: “Although we have vivid firsthand accounts of the coming of the plague elsewhere and a plethora of documentary sources of its onslaught for other parts of Europe, our knowledge of the nature and impact of the plague in the Iberian Peninsula is negligible indeed.”³⁵ Despite the deficiencies in the historiography, local studies of the Black Death in Castile, such as Marcelino Amasuno Sárraga’s *La Peste en la corona*

³² A short, yet, important seminal article is Jaime Sobrequés Callicó “La peste negra en la Península Ibérica.” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 7 (1973) 67-102; Jon Arrizabalaga, “La Peste Negra de 1348: los orígenes de la construcción como enfermedad de una calamidad social,” *Dynamis* 11, (1991): 73-117; Marcelina Amasuno Sárraga, “Cronología de la peste en la corona de Castilla durante la segunda mitad de siglo xiv” *Studia Histórica. Historia Medieval* 12 (1994): 25-52.

³³ These general surveys draw their knowledge from the abovementioned articles. Benedictow, *The Black Death*; Ziegler, *The Black Death*.

³⁴ Ziegler, *The Black Death*, 113.

³⁵ “The Black Death” *Medieval Iberia: an Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

de Castilla durante la segunda mitad de siglo XIV, provided concise summaries of medical and theological texts from the period.³⁶ Amasuno's monograph and a handful of insightful articles provide a valuable starting point to understand the chronological, geographical, economic, and medical details concerning the late medieval pestilence in Spain.³⁷

For studies on sixteenth century outbreaks of plague in Spain, a small, but growing, number of monographs and articles has been published in recent decades.³⁸ *The Plague Files*, by Alexandra and Noble Cook, carefully analyzed a corpus of records from

³⁶ Marcelino Amusano Sárraga. *La Peste en la corona de Castilla durante la segunda Mitad del siglo xiv*. (Salamanca: Consejería de Educación y Cultura, 1996).

³⁷ Jon Arrizabalaga, "La Peste Negra de 1348: los orígenes de la construcción como enfermedad de una calamidad social." *Dynamis* 11 (1991): 73-117; Ángel Vaca Lorenzo, "La Peste Negra en Castilla: Nuevos Testimonios" *Studia Historica* Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca (1990): 159-171. Nicolas Cabrillana, "La Crisis del Siglo XIV en Castilla: La Peste Negra en el Obispado de Palencia," *Hispania* 28 (1968): 245; Pilar León Tello "Judíos Toledanos Víctimas de la Peste Negra." *Sefarad* 31 (1977): 333-338.

³⁸ When speaking of disease and Spain in the sixteenth century, the concept automatically focuses on the colonies in the Americas, and only minimal attention has focused on Spain. When discussing epidemics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, historians concentrated on the impact of Old World disease on the New World, creating a "Sudden Collapse" in population, existing social structures, and religious culture. Most famously, Alfred Crosby argued about the crossing of disease pools and its impact of the destruction of the Indies of claiming the lives of 90% of the population. Reaffirming and recapitulating Crosby's basic argument, historians such as David Cook contentiously and bitterly argued that historians have falsely attributed the destruction of the New World to the Black Legend. Cook's radical view held central and profound force of historical change, arguing in line with McNeill. Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Pub, 1972); David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and the New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

Seville which detail legal and public health responses to plague from 1579-1582.³⁹ Their examination unveils the inner-workings of the Sevillian crisis management system in the context of drought, famine, and bankruptcy. Kristy Wilson Bowers, who has also meticulously researched the records in Seville, has argued that municipal authorities did not promulgate heavy handed policies in the city; rather, municipal officials, citizens, and foreign merchants negotiated terms to resolve disagreements.⁴⁰ Although this dissertation examines central Castile, it relies upon the valuable research of the Cooks and Bowers for important comparisons in some sections.

Adversities and Accomplishments in Avila: A Brief Historical Introduction with Chapter Overviews

The demographic and economic history of Avila presents a classic example of Castilian growth and decline.⁴¹ The foundation for expansion began when Christian

³⁹ Alexandra Cook and Noble David Cook. *The Plague Files: Crisis Management in Sixteenth Century Seville* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Kristy Bowers “Balancing Individual and Communal Needs: Plague and Public Health in Sixteenth Century Seville” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 81 (2007): 335-358. *Idem*, *Plague and Public Health in Early Modern Seville* (University of Rochester Press, 2013).

⁴¹ *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: New perspectives on the economic and social history of seventeenth-century Spain*, Ed. Thompson, I.A.A. and Bartolomé Yun Casalilla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Vicente Pérez Moreda, *Las Crisis de mortalidad en la España interior (siglos XVI-XIX)*; Carla Rahn Philips, *Ciudad Real: Growth, Crisis and Readjustment in the Spanish Economy*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1979); Bartolomé Bennasaar, *Valladolid en el Siglo de Oro: una ciudad de Castilla y su entorno agrario en el siglo XVI* (Valladolid: Ambito, 1989).

forces from the northern Pyrenees conquered the territories of central Spain in the tenth century. Knights, merchants, intellectuals, artisans, clergy and pilgrims slowly occupied and resettled in the newly reconquered cities and towns in central Iberia.⁴² After Alfonso VI conquered Toledo in 1085, they established permanent settlements in and around Avila – an area which is perched up on the Northern Meseta. In the decades that followed, the new inhabitants began marvelous construction projects such as the *Catedral del Cristo Salvador de Ávila* and *Basilica de San Vicente*, which remain to this day an architectural representation of the region's Catholic heritage. To safeguard this newly established frontier town, the *abulenses* constructed massive walls which encircled the city's perimeter. The fortifications protected the city from invaders but served also as a staging point for future military campaigns into Al-Andalus.

Jews were also among these early Christian settlers and played an integral role in the financial and cultural milieu of Avila up to the late fifteenth century. Jews – despite discriminatory legislation and prejudicial sentiments in numerous parts of the kingdom – worked as artisans, businessmen, and bankers, and through their professions they developed and contributed to the financial and commercial pulse of Avila.⁴³ Most of

⁴² Joseph O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 193; Teofilo Ruiz, *Crisis and Continuity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

⁴³ Ben Zion Netanyahu's exhaustive study *Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* covers anti-Jewish legislation, racial mindsets of Castilians, and riots against Jews and *conversos* up to the founding of the Spanish Inquisition. Netanyahu suggests that attacks against *conversos* could be classified as genocidal: "What the racists proposed, then, was a large-scale bloodbath, mass extermination or, to use the language of our time,

their shops were located not too far from the cathedral and *Mercado Chico*, an area which was part of the hustle and bustle of Avila's lively local economy.⁴⁴ Moreover, a formally segregated Jewish quarter did not exist in the municipality, unlike other regions in the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁵ Thus, the Jews of Avila lived in relative peace for most of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁶ One notable example that validates that fact was when frenzied riots against Jews broke out in cities, towns, and villages throughout many parts of Spain in 1391, Avila's Jewish community remained virtually unscathed.⁴⁷ In the aftermath of these aggressive outbursts of violence and forced conversions, some Jewish neighborhoods completely disappeared in other regions, but Avila's community continued to thrive and had arguably one of the largest populations of Jews in Castile.⁴⁸ Such nonviolent coexistence in Avila, sadly, was not permanent.

genocide" (New York: Random House, 1995), 990. Outbursts of violence did occur with regularity; however, a systematized, structured plan of extermination, in my view, never existed across peninsula. Avila stood as a refuge for many Jews after 1391. See Henry Kamen, *Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13.

⁴⁴ Pilar León Tello "La Judería de Ávila durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos." *Sefarad* 23 (1963): 36-53.

⁴⁵ Frequently cited as the most complete work on Avila's Jewish community is Pilar León Tello's *Judíos de ávila* (Ávila: Diputación Provincial de Ávila, 1963).

⁴⁶ One notable exception was in 1360 when residents of Avila and Segovia attempted to steal documents which listed their financial debts to their creditors. See León Tello, *Judíos de ávila*, 37.

⁴⁷ León Tello, "La Judería de Ávila," 37.

⁴⁸ Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 13; León Tello, "La Judería de Ávila durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos." This is not to suggest that Jews attained the same social,

From about 1470s to 1520, perceptions of Jews in Avila, along with their legacy, turned for the worse. Negative attitudes towards Jews intensified around 1480 when the *cortes de toledo*, based on growing suspicions of alleged Jewish plots to undermine the faith of new converts, ordered municipalities within the kingdom to create specifically designated neighborhoods for Jews and Muslims.⁴⁹ Over a two-year period, municipal and royal authorities supervised the relocation of the Jews to a district which was traditionally associated with filth and immoral activities. As the community was forcefully relocated, rabbis, who were the representatives of the Jewish community, reported cases of theft, vandalism, assault, and murder. Such attacks were part of intensified animosities towards Jews across the peninsula.⁵⁰ Adding to the physical abuse and social exclusion, local histories of Avila written in this period characterized Jews as nefarious Christ killers. These late fifteenth and early sixteenth century chronicles underscored the alleged malevolent, traitorous deeds of the Jews of Avila and Spain while completely disregarding any of their positive contributions. As the chronicles recounted the city's apostolic roots and emphasized a rich Catholic heritage, the narratives simultaneously depicted the Jews as the arch-nemesis of Christians in Avila.

economic, or political privileges as Christians in Avila. Although they were still an underprivileged minority, Jews, relatively speaking, experienced less prejudice and legal barriers in Avila than in other regions.

⁴⁹ León Tello, "Judería durante Reyes Católicos," 42-43.

⁵⁰ Benzion Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*.

Such histories, as I argue in Chapter 1, further marginalized the legacy of Jews in the collective social memories of Christians in Avila.

These negative sentiments and discourses came to full fruition during the pestilence of 1519, which is one of the main themes of Chapter 2. By the time the plague arrived, the residents, who were suffering from the agonizing psychological and physical effects of the epidemic, turned to local religious signs and symbols for healing and hope. The *abulenses* did not turn to “specialist” patron saints of plague, namely, Saint Sebastian or Saint Roch; rather, they relied upon the holy objects and saintly remains that were closely connected to their tradition and culture.⁵¹ The two significant objects that were part of Avila’s autochthonous spirituality were the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* and the relics of San Segundo, which are said to be Avila’s first saint and bishop. Not only were these local holy objects representative of God’s miraculous works in Avila, but they also had multi-layered meanings behind their histories, one which evoked memories of alleged Jewish crimes against Christians. The use of the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* during a Corpus Christi procession in 1519 and the discovery of the relics of San Segundo, as I argue in chapter 2, were popular religious ceremonies and discoveries during times of pestilence that helped to cement imagined collective memories of Jewish

⁵¹ William Christian argues that during moments of sudden catastrophe, villages turned to “saints known for the specialties” in search of deliverance and relief. Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch were the most common specialist saints for pestilence throughout most of Europe. Christian adds, “In the case of pestilence, the peasants of New Castile above all turned to Saint Sebastian, especially in the epidemic of 1507.” Such popular spiritual practices, however, do not happen in Avila in 1519. See *Local Religion*, 42.

crimes against Christians. The epidemic of 1519, as an exogenous force of historical change, devastated the *abulenses*, who then embraced the sacred objects of healing and the memories that were part of those objects.

As an external agent, plague likely entered Avila through the trade routes which intersect through the city. Like most pre-industrial Europeans, *abulenses* depended upon agricultural production for sustenance, but to supplement their income, many commoners in Avila also participated in the woolen textile industry.⁵² The Mesta, which was the shepherders' guild that formed the bedrock of the Castilian economy in the sixteenth century, strengthened Avila's manufactural and artisanal sector.⁵³ Wool carders and other artisans practiced their trade in the western end of the city, where shepherders and other travelers also stayed overnight. The perennial movement of peoples and goods was how, in all likelihood, pestilence and other zoonotic pathogens entered the province. Although Avila's trade links strengthened the industrial sector of the economy, during epidemics it was a source of great consternation for the municipal authorities, who saw the trade links as arteries through which contaminated peoples, animals, and goods passed through the city. Thus, one of the council's first objectives was typically to obstruct this flow with the hopes of blocking the pestilence.

⁵² Carla Rahn Phillips, *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xii; Julius Klein, *The Mesta: A study in Spanish Economic History 1273-1836* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

⁵³ Carla Rahn Phillips, *Spain's Golden Fleece*.

By the early sixteenth century, the walls of Avila were no longer used for military purposes; rather, they functioned as a barrier to keep out unwanted foreigners and suspicious goods from plague-ravaged areas. A theme that will reverberate throughout this dissertation is how the city council implemented the *guarda de peste*, which was often the first line of defense that the councilmen established to protect the city from plague. This temporary municipal ordinance levied during times of crises strategically utilized the existing fortifications and natural barriers. The cordon severed ties with trade networks and the rest of Spanish society, often causing economic stagnation in the months that followed. Once the threat of pestilence ended, the municipal authorities lifted the ban, which reopened Avila to outsiders, merchants, and businessmen and reconnected the city with the province and kingdom.

Along with the movements of people's, animals, and goods through Avila, ideas and cultural influences from the rest of Spain and the Mediterranean constantly reshaped understandings and responses to pestilence, which will be one of the central themes of Chapter 3. Although foreigners were generally prohibited from entering during crises, a new class of medical professionals – men trained under Philip II's revamped medical curriculum – were granted access to the city. In the epidemic of the 1580s, the municipal authorities voted to hire a new chief physician, Doctorr. Baez, and offered him a contract with a hefty salary for his future services. The third chapter examines how the overhaul of medical institutions in Madrid influenced the councilmen's decisions to allow which foreigners to come into the city. Such decisions, however, were not made unanimously, and the *regidores* debated amongst themselves about the value of hiring a

new medical professional with such a high salary. The evidence in the chapter suggests that the looming pestilence pressured the city council to employ a physician with the highest credentials at an exorbitant rate, despite the stagnant economy.

Developing theories on the etiologies of disease, such as contagionism, from the broader Mediterranean world influenced Avila's disease response measures, which is evident with the epidemic of 1599-1600. Medical experts from the sixteenth century, such as Luis de Mercado, theorized that inanimate objects and human-to-human contact could spread diseases. Influenced by these broader shifts in medical discourses, public health policies in Avila targeted the clothes worn by plague victims. Orders from the crown stated that contaminated objects should be destroyed. Thus, in 1600 the city council ordered men to confiscate all the clothing of suspected plague victims. Once collected, the men burned the fabrics and bedding in a bonfire. Chapter 4 argues that these ordinances, which were implemented in the heart of the winter, left numerous residents of Avila without clothing or bedding, and because of these policies, many died from the frigid temperatures. Despite pleas from the cathedral chapter and commoners, the *regidores* did not deviate from the orders that they had received from the monarch, even though they knew how destructive the royal policies were.

Source Base: *Actas Consistoriales*, *Actas Capitulares*, and Medical Treatises

Over a dozen hospitals, under the guidance of the cathedral, attended to the needs of the sick, orphaned, and convalescent in sixteenth century Avila.⁵⁴ Of the five main hospitals, one of them, the *Hospital de Dios Padre*, was established specifically to treat victims of plague. The administrative and financial support for these charitable institutions came from the cathedral chapter, which left behind an extensive corpus of records. The first phase of this dissertation analyzed over thirty volumes of records from *Hospital de Dios Padre*, which are now stored at the *Archivo Histórico Provincial de Avila*. After reading through the documents however, I came to the realization that the bulk of the content consisted of accounts of supply purchases, salaries for staff, and descriptions of private donations made to the hospital. Profiles of patients were virtually nonexistent. The records from the hospitals, although potentially valuable for other research questions, did have not any substantive material to advance the argument of this dissertation. Analysis of patient-physician interactions in Avila will therefore unfortunately be absent from this dissertation, and only minimal references will be made to the *Hospital de Dios Padre*, which did play a role in treating plague victims beginning in 1532. Despite the lack of rich descriptions on hospital procedures and patient profiles from Avila, a history of cultural and social perceptions of pestilence can still be retold

⁵⁴ The most in depth study on the hospitals of Avila is Andrés Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila: Actividad Hospitalaria del Cabildo Catedralicio (Siglos XVI-XIX)* (Ávila: Institución Gran Duque de Alba, 2000)

through municipal minutes, cathedral records, letters from the king, and early modern Spanish medical treatises.

The council of Avila was the primary institution responsible for carrying out public health policies and disaster response measures, and given that its authority to deal with catastrophes at the local level, it is necessary to explain some of the council's basic functions. The council consisted of fourteen *regidores* – city councilmen or alderman – who were of noble status. Officially, the king directly appointed all fourteen men; in reality though, all men obtained their seat on the council thanks to “inheritance, transfer or donation from their parents, parents in-laws or ancestors.”⁵⁵ It was these men, all from the upper echelons of society, who implemented and executed plans to control disasters. It is important to recognize though that decisions made by the council were not undertaken independently from the influence of other segments of society. Avila in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century was an oligarchical society where powerful families ruled the city by asserting their will and maintaining their authority through the council, which was essentially under their control. By the early sixteenth century however, a new social class of wealthy commoners emerged. These “New Men” gained indirect political influence, according to Jodi Bilinkoff.⁵⁶ Even though these successful men did not come from noble rank and did not sit on the city council, they were still able

⁵⁵ Gonzalo Martín García, “Introducción” in *Resumen de Actas de Concejo de Ávila* (Ávila: Diputación Provincial de Ávila), 14

⁵⁶ Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth Century City* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 69.

to influence political decisions.⁵⁷ Thus, while this new social group did not directly issue municipal ordinances, they likely did sway how the *regidores* implemented policies and interpreted orders from the Crown during crises, even though we do not directly hear their voices in the records.

In non-emergency meetings, the fourteen *regidores* discussed and voted upon municipal rules and regulations on a bi-weekly basis – normally meeting on Tuesdays and Saturdays. During moments of crises, however, the council, in some instances, did not meet at all.⁵⁸ Since the council was made up of aristocratic men who were “named officially by the King,” their higher social rank meant that they had special privileges, one of which was the right to flee Avila in the case of an outbreak.⁵⁹ A few of these noblemen exercised this right and took extended absences as the city bunkered itself in. Such men often fled to smaller, neighboring villages detached from major trade routes. Thus, in some severe outbreaks (1517-1519), the municipal records were silent for weeks at a time.⁶⁰ In such instances the burden to govern the city fell upon the aldermen who chose to stay in Avila. In these moments of peril, the remaining *regidores* met more frequently – sometimes every day of the week – to address the disarray. After hours of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁸ Martín García, “Introducción,” 14

⁵⁹ Nobles fleeing towns and cities during pestilence happened with regularity since the Black Death.

⁶⁰ Martín García, “Introducción,” 15.

debates and discussions, the councilmen agreed upon a set of policies and temporary ordinances which were designed to curb the disaster and bring relief to the *abulenses*. These decisions were made based upon the severity of the conditions, advice from local doctors, and directives from the monarch.⁶¹ Minutes from the council of Avila will be one of the central pillars of this study.

The second body of sources is the *actas capitulares* of the cathedral chapter, which documented the same crises as the city council but from an alternative perspective. Throughout the dissertation, I juxtapose the voices from these two institutions to highlight their similarities, discrepancies and conflicts. Although the cathedral did not directly handle matters on public health, the canons of the chapter, who numbered around 140 throughout the sixteenth century, expressed their discontent with some of the actions of the council.⁶² Such protests from the clergy and confraternities offer an alternative perspective on crisis management. The diverging viewpoints and the occasional conflicts between the two institutions helps me to formulate a better, non-partisan narrative.

Knowledge of the plague came in various forms, and another valuable set of texts come from the Spanish medical treatises. Doctors and trained physicians – commanded by the Crown, archbishops, markees, and dukes – drafted approximately seventy-five medical treatises to explain the causes, treatments and cures against plague throughout

⁶¹ Martín García, “Introducción,” 14

⁶² See Sánchez Sánchez Andrés “Introducción” in *Resumen de Actas de Cabildo Catedralicio de Ávila* (Ávila: Gran Duque de Alba: 2007).

the sixteenth century. Most of these treatises were written during the climax of outbreaks and served as a guide for physicians, surgeons, and city councils at the local level. With the onset of outbreaks in 1596, for example, Philip II and his advisors directed skilled health officials to ascertain the precise causes of the pestilence. In 1599 there was a radical upsurge in the publication of literature concerning plague, and out of the seventy-five medical treatises which were published in the sixteenth century, thirty-seven were published between 1598-1600.⁶³ These treatises often detail the rationale behind the public health directives from the monarch. By juxtaposing these treatises with municipal minutes and cathedral records, a more focused – albeit still imperfect – image of the past can be presented.

A word of caution must be added to this mode of interpretation. The emergence of plague is not always a sporadic or arbitrary event that eradicates older social system to create new ones as some historians who have studied pandemics have implied.⁶⁴ Rather, sixteenth century outbreaks and fear of plague pushed human actors to reconfigure social structures, but the institutions and organizations still survived, albeit in a transformed state.

Through a triangulation of these sources, I uncover how and in what ways disasters and the responses to them transformed local public health, religious, and political cultures. The findings from this research indicate that for most of the sixteenth

⁶³ Vicente Pérez Moreda, *Las Crisis de Mortalidad*, 247-248.

⁶⁴ Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*.

century, miasma and the strict regulation of cordons was the principal method to curb the spread of pestilence; however, by the late sixteenth century, the municipality was less concerned with maintaining the cordon. In 1599, the city did not construct or maintain fences to keep out foreigners, as it had done in previous decades. Their tactics, rather, centered on confiscating then burning the clothes and bedding of those who had become ill with plague, most of whom were poor. This shift in municipal tactics happened because of changes to medical thinking on the etiologies of plague throughout the Mediterranean. Philip II and his advisors embraced such medical theories – since they were considered to be the most effective methods at the time – and commanded the towns and cities throughout the peninsula to eradicate pestilential fabrics.

A second notable transformation occurred with religious responses to pestilence. While early sixteenth century devotion focused on holy objects of healing and Corpus Christi processions to alleviate the sufferings of the *abulense*, by the late sixteenth century, such practices were not common in Avila. The veneration of the relics of San Segundo and Corpus Christi processions did take place; however, such devotions did not take on any additional special meaning during late sixteenth century outbreaks. In fact, the council transferred funds reserved for the annual Corpus Christi processions to pay for the *guarda de peste*. Corpus Christi processions and holy objects of healing took on a less significant role by the late sixteenth century. The council, instead, devoted their efforts to organize and fund their ad hoc committee, the *junta de peste*, to block the spreading of pestilence in Avila.

Third, astrology played virtually no role in explaining pestilence in sixteenth century Avila. In centers of learning throughout Europe in the sixteenth century, experts analyzed and interpreted constellations and other celestial movements to determine the cause of pestilence; however, such methods of interpretation were not common in Avila.

CHAPTER 1

Discourses of Dirtiness and Cleanliness: Rearticulating Jewish Identity in Avila (1480-1520)

Historians have written extensively about the “violent character” that emerged in Christian communities living in Europe during the Black Death.⁶⁵ In cities and towns across Europe, a compulsive mistrust of Jews fanned the flames of paranoia, leading some Christians to blame Jews for the pestilence. Even though their accusations were unsubstantiated and without any merit, European Christians asserted that Jews had deliberately poisoned wells to bring harm to the community. Adding to this apprehension, a common belief was that the refusal of the Jews to renounce their faith and accept baptism had evoked God’s wrath, who had sent down the plague as a form of divine chastisement. Angry mobs unleashed their frustration and anguish on the minority Jewish populations by raiding the ghettos and murdering the residents. In this woeful chapter of medieval European history, the victims suffered not only from pestilence but also violent persecution from Christian neighbors. The motive for these aggressive attacks against Jewish communities stemmed from a long history of anti-Jewish sentiment that seems embedded in European Christian society.⁶⁶ In this context, one must ask: What cathartic responses were available for Castilian Christian communities

⁶⁵ Nicolas Cabrillana. “La crisis del siglo XIV en Castilla: La Peste Negra en el Obispado de Palencia.” *Hispania* Madrid. No 28. (1968): 256.

⁶⁶ See “Thinking about Judaism or the Judaism of Thought” in David Nirenberg’s *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

after 1492, once the perennial scapegoats were expelled from the Kingdoms and territories of Spain? The anti-Jewish stereotypes that fueled the paranoia and suspicions of Jews as the direct or indirect cause of the pestilence did not vanish with the Black Death nor with the Expulsion Edict in 1492; rather, beginning in the late fifteenth century, anti-Jewish discourses and perceptions of Jews in Avila, as well as Spain, went through a sequence of transformations.

To engage such questions in the context of late medieval Spain, one must first explore common interpretations that historians have crafted to understand why Christians directed blame towards Jews for causing the pestilence. David Nirenberg, the foremost expert on the history of violent persecutions against medieval Iberian Jews, expounded a provocative thesis in his highly acclaimed *Communities of Violence*. When tracing the pedigree of anti-Jewish stereotypes to comprehend the motivations behind mob violence, scholars have traditionally analyzed the long, complex history of anti-Jewish perceptions contained within “collective images, representations and stereotypes,” which Nirenberg calls persecuting discourses.⁶⁷ These historians, per Nirenberg, interpret the belligerent mobs as “irrational” participants who “inherited ideologies passively” from a bygone era.⁶⁸ In this interpretation, “uncritically absorbed, medieval people are presented as

⁶⁷ In the introduction to *Communities of Violence*, Nirenberg states that he stands in opposition to R.I. Moore *Formation of a Persecuting Society*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) and Carlo Ginzberg’s *Esctasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶⁸ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 6.

dominated by discourse, not as active participants in its shaping.”⁶⁹ Nirenberg points to the central flaw of this line of argument, namely that the persecuting discourses do not account for human agency – and therefore responsibility and culpability of the atrocities are removed from the equation. Nirenberg does not deny the existence nor the power of persecuting discourses. Yet, it is imperative to recognize that these discourses only acquired force “when people chose to find it meaningful and useful” to do so.⁷⁰ For Nirenberg, ruthless raids on medieval Jewish communities should not be interpreted as “irrational” surges of frustration and anger at a minority community; rather, belligerents accessed, manipulated, and acted upon – either knowingly or unknowingly – the prevailing discourses, which labelled Jews as traitorous, cunning villains.⁷¹

Using Nirenberg’s thesis as a theoretical scaffold, this chapter argues that the forced relocation of the local Jewish community to an unattractive, loathsome zone in the 1480s was a seminal moment for anti-Jewish sentiment in Avila. In virtually every municipality, certain stigmas are often attached to the less appealing and economically stagnant districts of the city; in contrast, the aesthetically pleasing topography of other good neighborhoods adds to the cultural and monetary value of the land. In Avila, the western end of the city was considered to be filthy and dirty, a place where harmful substances could contaminate the airs and spawn miasma. It is not surprising, then, that

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Nirenberg takes middle ground between the structure vs. agency debate, Ibid.

when the Catholic Monarchs issued a decree in 1480 to segregate Jews from Christians, the royal agents established the new “Hebrew neighborhood” in the west side. Forceful segregation, as argued by Nirenberg, was one avenue by which “new forms of communal identity are forged.”⁷² In Avila, Jewish identity soon became closely associated with the area that they resided – a place of disease and filth. Segregated areas and physical relocation of Jews and Christians produced new forms of “historical consciousness and historical writing.”⁷³ In the years before the expulsion edict, the residents of Avila filed several complaints about the stench emanating from the “Hebrew district,” which was unbearable for those who passed by.⁷⁴ This act of filing complaints was one of the means by which residents contributed to the re-articulation of discourses and stereotypes of Jews, who once enjoyed relatively peaceful and prosperous lives in Avila.

Soon after this initial, royally-mandated bifurcation of Christian and Jewish living quarters, chroniclers and notaries composed new histories of Avila, one of which glorified Avila as a hygienic, clean, pure, and wholly Catholic. These embellished histories reinforced an idealized Christian past and further marginalized Jews by broadcasting an anti-Jewish discourse. These histories reminded their readers of the unforgettable malevolent crimes alleged against the Jewish leaders of antiquity, who demanded the execution of the most revered saints in Spain and Avila: Santiago and San

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Documentación real del archivo del concejo abulense (1475-1499)*, edited by Blas Casado Quintanilla (Ávila: Gran Duque de Alba, 1994), 135.

Segundo, respectively. As these chroniclers praised the enduring faith of their forefathers, the stories embedded within the text clearly articulated the characteristics of Avila: Christian, ethical, clean, and healthy, which was the absolute antithesis of the language used to describe the “Hebrew district.”

Through an examination of official histories and chronicles from the sixteenth century, this chapter defines the key discourses of sanctity, dirtiness, and cleanliness of late medieval Avila, most especially how they related to an anti-Jewish discourse. Although it does not directly explore an episode of plague, the objective is to outline the spiritual traditions and semantics of filth and cleanliness which the *abulenses* drew upon to comprehend the meanings and origins of the disasters around them. This is not to suggest that the *abulenses* were passive recipients of an “inherited” discourse.⁷⁵ The evidence demonstrates that chroniclers, municipal officials, residents who filed complaints about Jews, and believers who journeyed to the relics of San Segundo were all active contributors in reproducing and rearticulating the existing anti-Jewish motifs. By examining the prevalent stereotypes and categories etched into the religious and geographical fabric of life in Avila, a foundation to understanding how and why *abulenses* reacted the way they did during epidemics of plague will be established.

⁷⁵ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 6.

Drawing New Districts: The Creation of Avila's "Hebrew Neighborhood" (1480s-1492)

This section explores the social role of Jews in late medieval Avila, which was, initially, relatively peaceful in comparison to other Spanish municipalities. The coexistence between Jews and Christians began to slowly deteriorate in the late-1470s however, as indicated by a surge of robberies and attacks on Jewish homes and disruptions of Jewish religious ceremonies. These events were, likely, related to broader patterns of anti-Jewish animosities in the Iberian Peninsula.⁷⁶ By the 1480s, the *cortes of Toledo* ordered municipalities to create separate districts for Jews and Muslims for those cities that had not already done so. The newly created "Hebrew District" was in an area of Avila where tanneries and artisans manufactured goods, a zone which was considered to be polluted and unhealthy. As a result of the process of relocation, Jewish identity began to be associated with the areas in which they resided – one that was filthy and emanated disease-causing miasma.

Before the emergence of such animosities, Jews represented a sizable portion of the population and played a key role in the economic and social vitality of the city in the fourteenth and most of the fifteenth centuries. Visitation records from 1303 indicate that around fifty Jewish families resided in Avila, which at the time was approximately one

⁷⁶ Ben Zion Netanyahu's *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* covers most of the major anti-Jewish trends in Spain before the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition; Luis Suárez Fernández, *La expulsión de los judíos: Un problema europeo* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2012)

third of the total population.⁷⁷ Financial transactions and notarial records suggest that these residents participated in a variety of trades and crafts, including “tailors, jacket makers, cloth shearers, wool combers” and in some instances, “surgeons and tax-collectors” as well.⁷⁸ As active participants in and contributors to the financial liveliness of Avila, Jews played a fundamental role in commercial operations. A Jewish business district, which was located between the two bustling markets – Chico and Grande – of Avila served as an integral hub of commerce, trade, and banking for residents and foreigners.

When a series of violent riots broke out against Jewish communities throughout Spain in the summer of 1391, the *aljama* of Avila remained virtually unharmed, which is a testament to the nonviolent coexistence between different religious groups in the city during the late medieval period.⁷⁹ In many parts of Spain, residents of cities, towns, and villages turned against their Jewish neighbors by raiding the homes and businesses in and near the *juderías*.⁸⁰ Synagogues were burned; possessions were stolen; homes were ransacked; and neighbors were murdered. Coupled with these physical assaults, mobs baptized numerous Jews against their will, even though church officials forbade such

⁷⁷ León Tello, *Los Judíos de Ávila*, 8-9; Mark Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom* (Leiden, 2004).

⁷⁸ León Tello, *Los Judíos de Ávila*, 4.

⁷⁹ León Tello, “La Judería de Ávila durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos,” 37.

⁸⁰ Benzion Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*, 164.

behaviors.⁸¹ Despite such widespread bloodshed in many parts of the Peninsula, the Jewish communities in Avila were left undisturbed.⁸² Even though other Jewish communities were suffering, Pilar León Tello, one of the most frequently cited medieval historian of Jewish life in Avila, has suggested that Avila's Jews were able to maintain their prosperous and peaceful lives.⁸³ In the aftermath of the 1391 pogroms and forced conversions, the *aljama* of Avila stood as one of the largest in all of Castile.⁸⁴ Although the pogroms of 1391 were one of the most tragic events in Sephardic history since they led to the single largest massacre of Jews in the Iberian Peninsula, this event also demonstrates how Avila was not part of such attacks and lived in a nonaggressive coexistence.⁸⁵ Such pacific relationships, however, were not permanent.

For reasons not entirely certain, hostilities and provocations towards the Jews in Avila intensified around the 1470s.⁸⁶ As the number of reported cases of harassment and

⁸¹ Benzion Netanyahu, 165.

⁸² Zamora was also an area that did not experience riots. See Manuel Ladero Quesada, "Judíos y cristianos en la Zamora bajomedieval" *Medina del Campo: Historia e historia de América* (1991).

⁸³ León Tello, "Introducción" in *Los Judíos de Ávila*.

⁸⁴ Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 15

⁸⁵ Philippe Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?" *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 4-18.

⁸⁶ Angus Mackay drew parallels between deteriorating economic conditions and popular violence and anti-semitism. "Popular Movements and Pogroms in Fifteenth-Century Castile" *Past & Present* 55 (1972), 33-67.

theft proliferated, a prominent representative of the *aljama*, Santo Aben Abibe, filed a formal complaint to the *corregidor* on 22 March, 1479.⁸⁷ His petition recounted that men barged into Jewish homes “taking their bedding and other clothes.”⁸⁸ Who the perpetrators were or why they committed such pilfering is not specifically mentioned in the records. Abibe, nevertheless, commented that the criminals were filled “with hatred and aversion” and stole what they pleased.⁸⁹ This particular incident went unresolved, and more significantly, it was not the last of its kind. Similar complaints continued to be recorded in the months that followed. For example, Don Abraham Sevillano on 24 January, 1480, urged the Captain of the Hermandad to apprehend the burglars who stole clothing, bedding, and jewelry from their homes.⁹⁰ The culprits not only stole possessions, they also disrupted and ridiculed the religious ceremonies of the Jews. The malefactors disregarded the privacy of Judaic rituals and “entered weddings and the

⁸⁷ *Documentación real del archive del concejo*, 97-98

⁸⁸ “Sepades que don Santo Aben Abybe, por sy e en nombre de las aljamas de los judíos e moros de la dicha cibdad de Avila, no fizo relación por su petición que en el nuestro consejo presentó, diciendo que las dichas aljamas e cada una de ellas de judíos e moros de ellos e de cada uno de ellos, tienen cartas e sobrecartas de los reyes pasados, nuestros antecesores, cuyas ánimas Dios aya, para que non les tomen de sus casas nin saquen ropa de camas nin otras, ropas asy de los judíos y moros,” *Documentación Real del Archivo del Concejo*, 100

⁸⁹ *Documentación real del archive del concejo abulense*, 100-102

⁹⁰ *Documentación real del archive del concejo*, 112-114 “Don Abrahán Seuillano, judío, en nombre de la aljama e judíos e judías de esa dicha cibdad, nos fizo relación por su petición diciendo que algunas personas de esa dicha cibdad e de otras partes, con odio e malquerencia e a fin de les fazer mal e dapno, se an entremetido e entremeten a quitar a los judíos e judías las ropas e vestidos.”

homes where Jews live” without invitation.⁹¹ By barging in and disrupting their sacred ceremonies, the hoodlums belittled the rituals of the Jews as the weddings were taking place. While these actions may seem like the undertakings of reckless hooligans, they were part of a burgeoning trend of anti-Jewish sentiments in Avila.

Discriminatory taxes levied upon Jews were also part of this trend of prejudice. In the 1470s, the council of Avila allocated resources and borrowed money for a costly developmental project. The aim was to construct and renovate “bridges, fountains, and fences.”⁹² As funds ran down and construction costs soared, the municipality had to obtain more resources to finish the what they had started and pay off their creditors. The solution to this ordeal was to extract revenue from the Jewish community. On 8 January, 1480, the Catholic Monarchs singled out the Jews, who were taxed and forced to pay the municipality for the debts it had incurred from the renovation projects. It is important to recognize that neither Christians nor Muslims were mentioned in this letter from the Monarchs. The rationale, as indicated in the correspondence, for selecting only the Jews was because they “were wealthy” and had accumulated their riches through “moneylending.”⁹³ Any person of the *aljama* who did not pay this discriminatory tax would be subject to a fine of “ten thousand *maravedís*.”⁹⁴ In the same year that these

⁹¹ Ibid., 112-114.

⁹² León Tello, *judíos de avila*, 62.

⁹³ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 63.

inequitable taxes were levied, Jews and Muslims had to forcefully relocate throughout the kingdom.

The creation of a new “Hebrew neighborhood” marks a seminal moment for Sephardic existence in Avila, since all Jews had to pack their belongings, furniture, and clothes and move to a newly formed district. The *cortes of Toledo* promulgated laws which ordered Castilian Jews to relocate to newly designated neighborhoods separated from Christians and Muslims.⁹⁵ In the case of Avila, the Hebrew district was placed in the western end of the city, which was the least pleasant zone within the city’s walls. This area was undesirable for the *abulenses* primarily because it sits much lower than the other districts within the walls. The western end within the walls had manufactories, inns, and artisanal workshops and was a social space for laborers such as “millers, cloth shearers, tanners, and shoe makers,” who congregated in this district.⁹⁶ The eastern end, on the other hand, is elevated and is higher than the rest of the city. Like any city, the social spaces throughout Avila held varied meanings, and in this particular case, the perched up eastern end, which is where the *Catedral de Cristo Salvador* is located, was the epicenter of religious and cultural activities. Directly adjacent to the cathedral are the two principal markets of Avila – *Mercado Chico* and *Mercado Grande*. Businesses in

⁹⁵ Francisco Ruiz Gómez, “La Convivencia en el marco vecinal: El régimen apartado de las juderías castellanas en el siglo xv.” *De Pasado Judío en los reinos medievales Hispánicos*. Cuneca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (2005): 247-287; Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*, 922.

⁹⁶ Félix Ferrer García, *La invención de la iglesia de San Segundo: Cofrades y frailes abulenses en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Ávila: Gran Duque de Alba, 2006), 53.

the eastern end thrived as residents ambulated between the squares, shops, and markets. The less appealing area of the city would be the new home for the Jews.

To assure that the segregation happened in a timely manner, the crown sent in an arbiter to oversee and expedite the separation. In 1481, Don Rodrigo Alvarez Maldonado was commissioned to demarcate the borders.⁹⁷ His task was also to facilitate and monitor the complicated logistical processes of rearranging these communities over two-year period. As the communities were being reorganized, wooden posts were installed to accentuate the lines of demarcation between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish neighborhoods.⁹⁸ Having been displaced to an undesirable area, the Jews were no longer part of the ethno-religious hodgepodge that characterized Avila for most of the medieval period. Although other cities in Iberia and Castile had Jewish quarters in the medieval period, Tello contends that before 1481 one cannot speak of the existence of a clearly defined “Jewish quarter” in Avila – although smaller clusters of Jewish homes and businesses did exist in the municipality. Under the surveillance of Don Rodrigo Alvarez Maldonado, the ghettoization created new social spaces and generated a level of separation which had previously been absent from Avila’s history. Through the process of this separation most importantly, the semiotics of Jewish identity and the language associated with their presence in Avila began to be associated with their new district – an area of dirtiness and filth.

⁹⁷ León Tello, *Judíos de Ávila*, 23.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

Formal complaints made by Jews and residents highlight the unsanitary conditions of the area. “Bad odors,” according to formal complaints by Jews and residents, radiated from the Hebrew neighborhood.⁹⁹ Ysaq Vachachón, a Jew who lived in the area, stated that the main source of the stench was the tanneries and the pelts which were processed near the western side.¹⁰⁰ Tanneries in this area processed animal hides, which is a laborious task that involves numerous steps of hair removal, degreasing, and soaking in a solution. Leather workers dumped the byproduct from this process into the streets, and the foul-smelling runoff slid westward down the city streets and walkways.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, the odiferous liquid “entered into the homes of the *judería* through the sewers.”¹⁰² More importantly, “the bad smell” were a health concern since it could bring harm to the adjacent areas.¹⁰³ Alvarez Maldonado was well aware of the horrendous stench and ordered, on multiple occasions, that the tanneries should be moved closer to

⁹⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁰ “Sepades que Ysaq Vechachón, judío, vezino de esa dicha cibdad, nos fizo relación por su petición diziendo que en la judería de esa dicha cibdad nonbrada por Rodrigo Alvarez Maldonado por vitud del poder que de nos tenían para apartar el aljama de los judíos [...] diz que de cada día labran más en allas e edificant en ellas nuevas tenerías e derraman la tinta por las calles de la dicha judería, e diz que las gentes non pueden conportar los malos olores e el dano que las casas e calles reciben, porque diz que entran por los alvanares el corredunbre e intería en la dicha judería dentre a las sus casas.” *Documento real del archivo de concejo*, 143-144.

¹⁰¹ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Ávila del Rey: Muchas Historias Dignas de Ser Sabidas Que Estaban*, ed. by Jesús Arribas (Ávila: Caldeandrín Ediciones, 2011), 62.

¹⁰² “porque diz que entran por los alvanares el corredunbre e tintería en la dicha juderíadentro a las sus casas.” León Tello, *Judíos de Ávila*, 144.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 73.

the river, just like in other cities; however his complaints fell on deaf ears.¹⁰⁴ The leather tanners simply did not listen and continued to dump liquid into the streets and sewers which passed through the *judería*.¹⁰⁵

Having received numerous complaints, the Catholic Monarchs intervened on 7 February, 1483 by ordering the magistrates and *corregidor* of Avila “to remove the tanneries and the other leather businesses,” which were near the Hebrew Neighborhood.¹⁰⁶ To guarantee that their orders were followed, Alvarez Maldonado watched over the cleaning and sanitization of the district, and those who did not adhere to the royal command had to pay 10,000 *maravedís* for their crime.¹⁰⁷ Despite efforts to purge the district of the runoff from the tanneries, the *judería* of Avila would continue to be associated with filth, squalor, and disease-spawning miasma – even after the expulsion edict of 1492.

One year before the Jews were expelled from Avila and the Kingdoms of Spain, animosities towards Jews reached a tipping point. In 1491, disdain for the Jews of Avila reached its apex after the Office of the Inquisition investigated accusations of the ritualized murder of a young Christian boy from *la Guardia*.¹⁰⁸ The charges stated that

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 89.

two Jews and a group of *conversos* kidnapped, tortured, and crucified an innocent child in the manner that Jesus suffered in the passion. Such trials of blood libel, which were common in late medieval and early modern Europe, often enraged Christians, some of whom directed and unleashed their anger towards Jews.¹⁰⁹ Infuriated by the stories of the alleged murder and host desecration, an Avila mob attacked the *judería*, which terrified the residents.¹¹⁰ Moreover, a group of furious men were so scandalized by the details of the trial that they “stoned a Jew.”¹¹¹ Frightened and uncertain, the Jews made numerous pleas to the crown for protection and security.¹¹² Community leaders explained that they were terrified of the mobs, who at any moment could “kill, or cripple, or burn them or their women and children and their goods.”¹¹³ The crown heard their petitions and offered assistance, assuring the Jewish community that they were safely protected under the authority of the crown.¹¹⁴ One year after their promise, however, the Catholic Monarchs changed Sephardic life forever with the Edict of Expulsion.

¹⁰⁹ R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

¹¹⁰ *Documentación real del archive del concejo abulense, 1475-1499*, 202-203.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² León Tello, *Judíos de Ávila*, 89.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

On 31 March, 1492, the Catholic Monarchs ordered the expulsion of all Jews “of any age” from the lands of Spain. In the edict, they rationalized their decision by mentioning that “bad Christians who Judaized and apostatized those from our holy Catholic and apostolic faith.” Having been aware of these religious “perversions” for many years, the Catholic monarchs in 1480 had “commanded to separate the said Jews in all the cities, villages and places” within the kingdom. It had been their intention that through the act of forced separation, some of the harm done to the faith “would be remedied.” This however was not the case, since the religious, ecclesiastical, and secular authorities informed the Monarchs that the inquisitors still found “many guilty” of damaging the faith of Christians. Thus, the Catholic Monarchs stated that the only solution was to remove all Jews from their Kingdoms.¹¹⁵

Within four months, the Jews of Avila had to either convert or pack their belongings and leave the kingdom. Calculating the numbers of Jews who left Avila is presents numerous problems, which León Tello has outlined in her article “Judería de Avila.” According to León Tello, no reliable census was conducted in Avila until

¹¹⁵ “Nos fuemos ynformados que en nuestros reynos avia algunos malos christianos que, judaysauan e apostotauan de nuestra santa fe catolica, de lo qual era mucha cabsa la comunicacion de los judios con los christianos; en los cortes que hesimos en la cibdad de Toledo el anno pasado de mill e quatrocientos e ochenta annos, mandamus apartar a los dichos judios en todas las cibdades, villas e lugares de los nuestros reynos e senorios e dalles juderias e lugares apartados donde biuyesen, esperando que con su apartameiento se remediaria, e otrosy ouymos procurado e dado horden como se hiziese ynquisicion en los dichos nuestros reynos e sennorios, la qual commo sabeis, ha as de dose annos que se ha fecho e fase, e por ella se han fallado muchos culpantes segund es notorio e sgund somos ynformados de los ynquisidores e de otras muchas personas religiosas e eclesyasticas e seglares, consta e paresce el grand danno que a los christianos.” *Documentación real del archivo del concejo abulense*, 210-214.

1530.¹¹⁶ Given the lack of evidence, historians resorted to tallying the number of heads of Jewish households mentioned in the city records, which was one-hundred seven. When multiplying this figure by five, which the average size of a family during this period, the total is 535. While such figures provide us with an approximation, they, however, do not include the Jews who were poor, which the records do not mention. Secondly, such numbers are problematic since many documents have been lost.¹¹⁷ Despite our inability to trace how many Jews converted or left, what is certain is that Jewish existence in Avila formally ended in the summer of 1492.¹¹⁸

Chronicles of Cleanliness: Disseminating Semantics of Sanitation in Sixteenth century (1492-1607)

Despite the formal departure of Jews from Avila, the western end of the city was still referred to as the *Judería*, and continued to be associated with unsanitary conditions. On 3 April, 1502, numerous residents claimed that “the stench of the waters” from the Jewish neighborhood was bringing “great harm.”¹¹⁹ When residents filed their complaints, they referred to the malodorous district as “the *Judería*,” even though no

¹¹⁶ León Tello. “Judería de Ávila Bajo Los Reyes Católicos,” 44.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Serafín Tapia Sánchez, “Los judíos de Ávila en vísperas de la expulsión.” *Sefarad: Revista de Estudios Hebraicos y Sefardíes* 57 (1997): 135-178.

¹¹⁹ *Resumen de Actas del Concejo de Ávila*, 24.

Jews had resided in the area for ten years.¹²⁰ Memories of a once significant Jewish population, perhaps, still lingered in the popular consciousness. Recognizing that the source of the stench originated from and near the *Judería*, the council sent out two *regidores*, who were given authority, to handle the matter as they saw fit.¹²¹

At the turn of the sixteenth century, the council of Avila, which was aware of such unsanitary conditions, embarked on a campaign to improve the sanitation standards of the city, particularly the areas closest to the *Judería* and the busy walkways. To that end, a plan – which was sponsored by the crown – was set to remove awnings and balconies near the plazas and streets with the most traffic. By eliminating the overhangs, the noxious, muddy air could be released into the atmosphere. Given the unhygienic conditions of the *Judería* in Avila and the harm it could bring to the residents, the council of Avila made efforts to regulate littering and garbage disposal – substances which could spawn miasmatic airs. Since the late fifteenth century, the most common method to maintain cleanliness was to issue municipal ordinances which prohibited disposal of trash and dumping of stale sewage in major streets and plazas. To assure that these areas were clean, anyone who discarded manure, trash, or other filth in the streets or plazas was issued a fine. In addition, leather tanners were instructed not to pour contaminated water, which was a byproduct of the tanning process, into the streets or walkways which led to the plazas. Any tanner who failed to adhere to such ordinances

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

also had to pay a fine for each offence. Public sanitation efforts were regularly reaffirmed all throughout the sixteenth century, particularly during outbreaks of pestilence.

One notable campaign to update the city's sanitation standards in the early sixteenth century was the removal of canopies and awnings, which were thought to trap in harmful, disease-inducing airs. From the Jewish district to Mercado Chico, multiple overhangs provided shade for walkways and protection from rain. The buildings leading up to the central markets had overhangs flanking each side, but by the early sixteenth century, these covers were considered a public health hazard. On 10 September, 1512, Queen Juana of Castile, recapitulating the summaries of her official agents in Avila, quipped about the architectural flaws which blocked natural light:

Many buildings and homes are constructed with overhangs and balconies [...] which stretch out over the streets [...] the said streets are very sad and gloomy in such a manner that neither light or the sun's rays can enter these areas. The streets are humid and muddy and dirty, which prompts everyone to say that the whole community receives much harm.¹²²

¹²² AMA, Caja 3, Libro 3, fols. 11-12 "están hedificados muchos edificios saledisos e corredores e balcones por las delateras de las casas que salen por gran trecho a las dichas calles e toman e ocupan toda o la mayor parte dellas, de manera que las dichas calles estan muy tristes e sonbrias de tal manera que en ellas non puede entrar ni entra claridad ny sol e de continuo estan muy umidas e lodosas e suzias e lo qual todos disen que toda la communydad de la dicha ciudad rescibe mcho dano e como quier que la dicha ciudad tiene ordenanzas sobre esto que no es guardada ni executada segund."

Juana claimed that it was a disservice to her and to her kingdom that such defects in the public squares and walkways could exist. Since filth and garbage accumulated in these areas, Juana, based on the suggestions of her advisors in Avila, commanded that:

From here on, no person or any persons of whatever state or condition or preeminence or dignity may not work on or build [...] *pasadisos e saledisos*, *corredores* nor *balcones* nor other edifices that extend out into the street from the wall which has been constructed. All of this is to be taken down immediately. They are not to be renovated or rebuilt. [This is done] so that sunlight and brightness may enter through the streets and [the overhangs] may cease all the harm that it is doing to the people. Under pain of 10,000 *maravedís*.¹²³

The crown made it a priority to bring in natural light to the pathways leading to the plazas and take down the *saledizos*.

The council adhered to these directions and ordered for the removal of these overhangs so that the area could be aerated; however, such a project would be costly. The mission was to remove the architectural appendages so that fresh air and sunlight, which were thought to eliminate noxious fumes, could pass through. By stripping away the awnings, covers, and overhangs, the putrid stench in the air could be released into the atmosphere as gentle breezes ventilated the district.¹²⁴ Although this project required funds for the renovation of multiple buildings on the streets leading up to Mercado Chico, the council saw it as a valuable investment since it was ultimately for “the health of the

¹²³ *Resumen de Actas del Concejo*, 355-356; AHPA *Actas Ayuntamiento* Caja 3, Libro 3, fols, 11v-12v

¹²⁴ AHPA, *actas ayuntamiento*, Libro 4, fol. 14.

city.” Removing the balconies required some deconstruction of the edifice itself, but for the council, allowing light and fresh air to enter the city centers and markets was worth the cost.¹²⁵ The council declared on 19 July, 1512

At the entrances of the Plaza of Mercado Chico, which is the street of Andrin [a street which leads directly to the *Juderia*] and on the route to the fishmonger, overhangs had been constructed [...] which continues to cause much damage to the city. The council agrees that [the coverings over Mercado Chico] be brought down near the entrances as well as the exits, for the health of the city.¹²⁶

Such ordinances, in the words of the council, was for the general “health of the city”; however, it is imperative to recognize that the remodeled areas would primarily bring sanitation to the eastern, wealthier side of the city. While the crown and council had a penchant for public health, these costly construction projects did not extend to the *Juderia* itself – just the streets that connect the *Juderia* to the main plaza. Only the areas that were deemed more culturally and socially valuable, so it seems, were worthy of health codes.

As public health and municipal sanitation regulations were updated, chroniclers – who were in some instances paid by the council of Avila – made it a priority to project an image of Avila as a healthy, sanitary place. Despite the language of disease and filth

¹²⁵ Construction and layout of buildings were an important facet of removing miasma even until the early 20th century. Hospitals were constructed not with single private rooms as in the 21st century, but they were kept open in a large hospital ward so that bad air could pass through to escape. The designs of hospitals reflect medical theories of the era. See Annmarie Adams, *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital, 1893-1943*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹²⁶ AHPA, actas ayuntamiento, Libro 4, fol., 14.

associated with the Jewish quarters in the 1480s, chroniclers from the sixteenth century, who touted Avila's rich culture and exquisite architecture, boasted about the healthy and clean living conditions of the city, while omitting all the details of filthiness. One such narrative highlighted how Avila was so clean and disease-free that it served as a retreat for the Castilian monarchy during an epidemic. Luis Ariz's *Historia de Las Grandezas de Avila* recounts that since the early fifteenth century Castilians viewed Avila – both the city and the province – as a cleaner and therefore healthier place, making it the ideal sanctuary to seek refuge during epidemics. When “a serious infirmity of pestilence” struck Toledo in 1423, which was the Capital of Castile at the time, John II of Castile sought “refuge in Avila,” since he was supposedly fond of the salubriousness of municipality.¹²⁷ As the outbreak swept through Toledo, the King relocated his court to Avila on 28 March, making it his temporary safe haven.¹²⁸ John II managed personal business and attempted to negotiate peace with foreign ambassadors from Portugal for his kingdom within the perimeter of the impressive walls of Avila.¹²⁹ The king, in the words of Ariz, temporarily moved his court to Avila because of the physical protection that the city offered and also because of the holy relics that the city had in its possession.¹³⁰ Although the events that Ariz recounted cannot be verified, *his narrative* demonstrates

¹²⁷Luis Ariz, *Historia de las Grandezas de Avila*. 27

¹²⁸ Cañas Gálves, Francisco de Paula. *El Itinerario de la Corte de Juan II de Castilla (1418-1454)*. Madrid: Sílex, 2007. Pp. 202.

¹²⁹ Luis Martinez, 1607. *Historia de las grandezas de la ciudad de Avila*. Pg. 313

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

that the chroniclers in the sixteenth century tried to depict Avila as an idyllic safe haven. The chroniclers and historians based out of Avila crafted idealized representations of Avila's hygienic conditions for a Castilian audience, underscoring its historical importance for protecting the monarchy during the most troubling times while leaving out discussions of the filth.

A salient theme that runs through these narratives is that Avila, because of its geography and cleanliness, was protected from the disastrous effects of pestilence. Gonzalo De Ayora – author of the frequently cited *Avila del Rey, muchas historias dignas* – praised the pristine public areas, which contributed to the general health of the city. In the opening chapter, De Ayora made a reference to a pestilence which was wreaking havoc throughout central Spain in 1517, which was inflicting considerable damage to Valladolid. Ayora praised Avila, admiring it as a place that:

is so healthy that it has been almost two years since the whole province has been infected by plague; however, the air of Avila has been preserved and continues to be preserved immaculately. Not only has it defended against universal contagion, but also from foreigners who have come from other corrupted parts of the Kingdom.¹³¹

¹³¹ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Avila del Rey. Muchas Historias Dignas de Ser Sabidas Que Estaban Ocultas*, 58-59 “e así es tan sana que siendo dos anos ha casi toda la provincia infeccionada de pestilencia, el aire de Avila se ha conservado y conserva inmaculado; y no solamente ha defendido a sus naturales de esta contagion universal, mas aun a muchos extranjeros venidos de partes corruptas.”

The absence of pestilence was, therefore, a direct result of the pure air. De Ayora, then, implicitly acknowledged the effectiveness of the city council's traditional measures of cleanliness for the principle reason why plague had not entered Avila. Yet, De Ayora's assessment and descriptions were far from impartial.

Municipal minutes from 1518 demonstrate that the city council hired chroniclers, in this case De Ayora, to write favorable narratives of Avila. Through the hiring of De Ayora, the *regidores*, who, along with their families, were the de facto rulers of Avila, sought to propagate a positive image of Avila as a healthy and sanitary place. To compensate De Ayora for his adulatory narrative of Avila, the council gave him "ten rods of velvet which is of good quality and twenty bushels of barely and ten wagonloads of lumber and twelve pairs of birds."¹³² As the Chronicler for Isabella the Catholic, De Ayora's analysis of Avila advanced and propagated a notion of Avila's wholesome healthiness. Like De Ayora, other late medieval and early modern historians and chroniclers attributed the salubriousness of Avila to its high elevation, its impressive walls and general cleanliness as reasons for its ability to maintain lower casualties during serious outbreaks of plague.

Despite these sixteenth century histories, the actual level of cleanliness varied considerably within the city walls. Animals ambulated through the streets, residents dumped sewage out their doors, and pigsties – located near the main city walls – were infrequently cleaned. The sanitation differed in each of the barrios, and a

¹³² AMA actas consistoriales. Libro 2 181.

neighborhood's proximity to the cathedral and major plazas often determined whether sanitation codes were applied. Although some Castilians may have viewed Avila as a sanitary place, *abulenses*, particularly the city council, were well aware of the rancid conditions that ran through the city. The council constantly had to issue municipal ordinances to manage trash and clean the filth.¹³³ Furthermore, during plague outbreaks, the city council ordered the town criers to preach in the main squares and markets that pigsties in the cities should be removed and animals should not be allowed to move around freely.

Crafting Histories: The Legend of San Segundo and Avila's Pure Christian Past (1517-1607)

As chroniclers embellished the purity of Avila, they also crafted histories of the untainted, Christian lineage of the city. This section analyzes narratives, written in sixteenth century Avila that recount the lives of San Segundo – the first bishop of Avila – and Santiago – the apostle of Jesus and patron Saint of Spain.¹³⁴ The purpose of this

¹³³ In 1594, the remains of the body of San Segundo were moved from one of the less sanitary parts to the cathedral. One of the main arguments for the relocation of these relics was because these relics were seen to be part of the less cleaner parts of the city.

¹³⁴ Official history should not be confused with or considered to be true history. Rather, it suggests that the history had the formal approval of political or ecclesiastical institutions of power. Contrastingly, unofficial history lacks endorsement from the powers that be. Richard Kagan's defines official history in greater detail in the introduction to *Clio & the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

section is to demonstrate how such histories and legends not only reinforced notions of an apostolically-rooted Christian past, but also communicated powerful anti-Jewish motifs in the decades following the expulsion of the Jews. As these narratives helped to shape Spain's confessional identity, this very process of character formation excluded and denigrated Jews, who were portrayed as the principal antagonists and malevolent forces blocking the spread of Christianity in the first century. The victims depicted in these narratives were the early Christians, who suffered and died because of the alleged chicanery and wickedness of the Jews.

Most contemporary academic historians argue that stories of first century Christian missionaries in Spain are unverifiable myths, which have their origins in the medieval period. The *Breviarium Apostolorum*, which can be dated to the early seventh century, gives the earliest existing account of Santiago's journey to Spain, leaving many contemporary experts to speculate that the myth of Santiago was crafted in either the late sixth or early seventh century. One of the foremost specialists on this topic, Francisco Marquez Villanueva, offers a scathing assessment concerning the source base around Santiago. In his monograph *Santiago: Trayectoria de un Mito*, he contends that the myth of Santiago "is a world of legends, of apocrypha and of distortions very distant from all conventional history."¹³⁵ While his assessment may appear harsh, the logic and evidence

¹³⁵ Others have already examined this history. For a recent, complete overview of a critical history of early Christianity in Spain, see Francisco Marquez Villanueva's Francisco Márquez Villanueva. *Santiago: Trayectoria de un mito*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2004), 43

presented in his arguments are sound. Since archaeological and historical research have not been able to authenticate the presence of Santiago or his fellow evangelists prior to the *Breviarium Apostolorum*, the legitimacy of the accounts concerning the life of Santiago and the *Varones Apostolicos* in Hispania remain unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, the power that these myths had in influencing the religious, political, and military ethos of Spain throughout history is undeniable.¹³⁶

Formulating a coherent narrative of the first Christians in the Iberian Peninsula, then, is challenging because the sources which recount their lives, vocations, journeys, and deaths have been distorted since the medieval period. The eminent historian of Spain Américo Castro reflected on the complexities of narrating Santiago's life, since it cannot, strictly speaking, be examined in any "fixed" historical-temporal space.¹³⁷ The primary reason is that since the medieval period, chroniclers and historians have complicated this narrative by adding more and more unsubstantiated layers of details to the history. Parsing out the source of each layer is a formidable – if not impossible – task for the historian.

The focus of this section will be narrowed to sixteenth century historiography and records, bypassing some of this methodological complexity. My objective in this section is not to trace the lineage and evolution of these narratives of ancient Christianity or the

¹³⁶ Numerous historians have made this claim, and many of whom have drawn inspiration from T.D. Kendrick magisterial work *St. James in Spain* (London: Methuen & Co., 1960).

¹³⁷ Américo Castro, *Santiago de España*. (Santiago de Compostela: Emecé Editores, 1958), 16.

complex processes of myth-making, which are outside of the scope of this dissertation. Rather, it is to examine how and in what ways sixteenth century histories of early Christians shaped religious consciousness, signs, and symbols in Avila – all of which resurface and are fully expressed in the epidemics of 1519.

Before beginning a critical analysis of the discourses concerning San Segundo, it is necessary to provide a brief, critical evaluation of the sixteenth century sources which recount his life. Two key authors, Antonio Cianca and Fray Luis Ariz, had a pivotal role in crafting official histories of Avila. These men had close ties to and were participants of Avila's religious and political institutions, particularly Cianca. When analyzing their works, one can get a glimpse – albeit a murky one – of the traditional attitudes and beliefs of the *abulenses*, whose voices were indirectly transmitted through the pages of the chronicles.

From these two works, Antonio Cianca's *Historia de la vida, invención, milagros, y translación de San Segundo, Primero Obispo de Avila* is often cited as the most pivotal and well-researched history.¹³⁸ As a unique blend of official history and hagiography, this work explores the journey of Santiago, the *Siete Varones Apostolicos*, the conversion of the inhabitants of Avila by San Segundo, the subsequent discovery of San Segundo's relics during the pestilence of 1519, and the relocation of his body from outside the city walls to the cathedral in 1594. As a notary and member of the Confraternity of San

¹³⁸ Due to its cumbersome length, I will refer to this work as *Historia de San Segundo* from this point forward.

Segundo, Cianca had, quite possibly, the best knowledge of Avila's popular spiritual practices and traditions, making him a reliable first and second hand source. His interpretation of the events gives a unique viewpoint of how a member of Avila's religious and political community understood San Segundo. Nevertheless, this chronicle was more than just a history of a local saint. *Historia de San Segundo*, which was published in 1595, was crafted during the height of the Counter-Reformation; therefore, it was part of a "devotional climate" and genre which explained and justified the sanctity of relics.¹³⁹ The purpose of writing such genres of ancient religious history, as argued by Philip Soergel, was to demonstrate "apostolic succession" and the "the tangibility of plethora of miracles" to retort Protestant critiques.¹⁴⁰ Some historians have referred to Cianca's work as standing somewhere "between a chronicle and hagiography," which, in my view, is an apt description.¹⁴¹

Even though parts of his work can be classified as a hagiography, one should not hastily speculate that his chronicle was crafted for the sole purpose of defending and further perpetuating a myth, especially since Cianca explicitly expressed his own uncertainties and skepticism about the multiple discrepancies which exist in the narratives of Santiago and the *Varones Apostolicos*. *Historia de San Segundo* presents a

¹³⁹ Philip Soergel, *Wondrous in his Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 195, 185.

¹⁴¹ See Manuel Parada Lopez de Corselas "El Cáliz 'de San Segundo' entre la realidad y el mito: avatares de un camino de Santidad." *ArqueoUCA* 2 (2012): 109

judicious evaluation of the patron saint of Avila through a meticulous reading and assessment of the histories and chronicles at the time. Mindful of the multi-layered inconsistencies within each of the chronicles, he cautiously juxtaposes the narratives of medieval and early modern historians, laying out their discrepancies. After comparing and contrasting existing accounts he affirms that “there is great diversity and discord between the authors” who wrote about Santiago.¹⁴² Cianca acted as a reporter of evidence by frequently citing conflicting accounts and highlighting their contradictions. His approach was, in numerous instances, impartial, and he carefully weighed in on the available evidence he had at his disposal: hagiographies, official histories, notarial records, and oral traditions. He did not adopt an interpretation simply because it was the prevailing official thought. Even though he attempted to craft a professional history of San Segundo, he used a language that at times expresses his own doubts about the accuracy of the accounts. For example, in four different instances in *Historia de San Segundo*, he refers to some of the accounts as “legends,” when evaluating their accuracy.¹⁴³ In this context, Cianca is not dismissing the “legend” concerning the apostles, but rather, acknowledging their shaky foundation. Subsequent authors appropriated large segments from Cianca’s interpretations – which was the authoritative chronicle on San Segundo from the sixteenth century – while inserting their own readings of the record.

¹⁴² Cianca, 31.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 11.

One such author is Fray Luis Ariz, whose *Historia de las grandezas de la Ciudad de Avila* borrowed – and at times heavily plagiarized – from Cianca’s volume. Published in 1607, *Historia de Las Grandezas* is cited as the first published work on the history of Avila.¹⁴⁴ Jesus Arribas – a contemporary historian who has written extensively on Avila – correctly observed that Ariz has sections which “copied entire passages from” Cianca’s chronicle.”¹⁴⁵ In his critical assessment of Ariz, Arribas argues that it is evident that Ariz did not even bother “to change a comma” when egregiously plagiarizing from *Historia de San Segundo*. With seemingly no shame at all, Ariz even duplicated “the inscriptions that Cianca drew.”¹⁴⁶ Despite appropriating entire sections to his own work, Ariz did make alterations to the narratives of San Segundo by inserting his own reinterpretations, which consequently adds more complexity to the history of San Segundo. The minor variations which were added to the text encapsulate alternative views which were also important in shaping myths of San Segundo.

Although only covering the ancient history of Avila briefly in his celebrated work, Gonzola de Ayora’s (1466-1538) *Avila del rey* provides a key interpretative lens for this ancient history, since sections of his original chronicle were censored by officials.¹⁴⁷ Thus, portions of his work can be classified as an unofficial history. Since

¹⁴⁴ Jesús Arribas, 102.

¹⁴⁵ Jesús Arribas, 102.

¹⁴⁶ Jesús Arribas, 103.

¹⁴⁷ Jesús Arribas’ included the censored sections of *Avila del Rey* in the appendix. Ayora’s history, particularly those dealing with the Varones Apostolicos and San

his work was published in 1519, it offers a unique, although brief, view of what the *abulenses* thought about San Segundo before the emergence of a cult of San Segundo.

These accounts with all their imperfections, plagiarisms, and contradictions give historians a unique metahistorical lens to interpret the historical consciousness of sixteenth century Avila. Through a careful assessment of these chronicles, an understanding of how and why anti-Jewish discourses lingered even after Jews had already been expelled will be better understood.

The sixteenth century chronicles and histories from Avila indicate that fifty days after Pentecost, each of the Twelve Apostles was assigned a region to spread the teachings of Jesus. Santiago embarked on a mission to evangelize the Roman Province of Hispania, which was a “fertile and bellicose” land.¹⁴⁸ The chroniclers offer conflicting views as to where Santiago first began his campaign in Hispania, but the most commonly accepted version among Castilians, according to Cianca, was that he “entered through Aragon” and later carried on his mission into “Cantabria, Asturias, and Galicia,” which are located in Northern Spain.

Segundo was censured by Garibay. What this indicates is that Ayora offered a competing view to some of the existing narratives. Aragon for example, was intent on claiming that their Church was the first to be establishing in Spain, unlike Ayora, who claimed that San Segundo established the first church in Avila. It provides a general overview of the history of Castile and Avila from antiquity to the early sixteenth century, but most importantly, the censorship of certain areas of this text reflect the sensitivities and the conflicts on how to interpret the history of the *varones apostólicos*, 122-123.

¹⁴⁸ Here, Cianca references Bergamo and Cesar Baronio, and Ambrosio de Morales. Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 2.

By 37 A.D.¹⁴⁹ Santiago “preached the holy gospel and Christian doctrine” in Hispania, but unfortunately, his mission was unsuccessful, bearing only “little fruit.”¹⁵⁰ Aggravated but still hopeful, Santiago prayed on the banks of the Ebro River in the city of Zaragoza. There, according to virtually all medieval and early modern accounts, the Virgin Mary, who was standing on a pillar flanked by several angels, appeared to Santiago reassuring him that “there will be an abundance of Christianity in Spain.”¹⁵¹ It was through the “seed of the divine word,” which the Apostle was destined to sow, that Christianity would flourish in Hispania. It was at this decisive moment that Santiago was revitalized and filled with zeal to carry out his vocation. To commemorate and venerate this miraculous intervention, Santiago constructed a small chapel dedicated to Mary, which is where the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Pillar of Zaragoza stands today.¹⁵² This story, which emphasizes the power of Marian apparitions and apostolic heritage,

¹⁴⁹ Estaban of Garibay states “treinta y siete de su nacimiento.” Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 5

¹⁵¹ No account that I have come across seems to contradict this event. Some accounts, such as de Ayora’s, omits the details of this miraculous encounter; Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 5.

¹⁵² Ayora’s account contradicts this claim by declaring that Avila “had the first Cathedral Church of Spain,” which was founded by San Segundo, 62. Jesús Arribas noted that “The arragonese authors want the first church to be the one of Our Lady of the Pilar of Zaragoza; saying that it had been founded by Santiago and dedicated by him, although I do not know with what ancient texts they are able test” that argument. *Historia, literature y fiesta en torno a San Segundo (Ávila 1519-1594)* (Ávila: Gran Duque de Alba, 2002).

represents a watershed moment for Spanish Catholicism.¹⁵³ Rather than staying in Hispania to carry out his mission, Santiago, for reasons not made clear, decided to return to Jerusalem with a group of loyal disciples.

Cianca's retelling of the events in Jerusalem leaves a dominant impression on the reader: the "perfidious Jews" were filled with resentment and rage at the Christians, who had successfully been converting the masses.¹⁵⁴ While at Jerusalem, Santiago, along "with the disciples from Spain," began "preaching and teaching the holy Catholic and Christian faith within the city and throughout all the land with much spirit and fervor," which infuriated the Jews.¹⁵⁵ The sudden wave of conversions that swept the region grabbed their attention, causing "great anger" among their ranks and prompting them to take action against the Santiago and the disciples.

Seeking to disrupt the mission of Santiago, the Jews of Jerusalem solicited the assistance of Hermógenes, a man "learned in the art of magic," and his disciple, Fileto, to put a halt to the conversions.¹⁵⁶ The two magicians were directed to "debate with the Holy Apostle" and convince Santiago of his erroneous teachings so that all would disavow Christianity. If these magicians could not win the debate through skillful

¹⁵³ The name María del Pilar is still common in parts of Northern Iberia, suggesting that the legacy of this story still reverberates through Spain. See Carla Philips, *Concise History of Spain*, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

argumentation and rhetoric, their second task was to “abuse him with the demons that they can summon.”¹⁵⁷ To the chagrin of the Jews, their plan backfired, and Santiago swayed the magicians to embrace Christianity. Cianca states that “not only did [the magicians] not convert [Santiago], but the Holy Apostle converted the two magicians to our holy Catholic faith.” Santiago’s success enraged the Jews even more, who now desired to have Santiago executed.¹⁵⁸

The ultimate triumph of Santiago over sorcery and Jewish conspiracies delivers a seminal theme throughout the multiple versions of this story: Jews did everything in their power – namely, using money and magic – to halt the spread of Christianity. Inherent in this story is the lack of true faith among the Jews, who turned to magicians to carry out their plots, suggesting that their faith in God was superficial. This narrative encapsulates a recurring theme of disdain, distrust, and outright hatred for Jews, and rested on stories which undoubtedly fed into the hearts and minds of the *abuslenses*. Embedded within this narrative is a theme which had been reverberated throughout much of sixteenth century Spain: all true believers of God would turn to Christianity and reject magic and Judaism.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Although Jews outnumbered Christians in this early period, their relationship with the Roman authorities were not always peaceful. Agreements between the Romans and Jews in the first century permitted Jews to practice their faith without disruption in the early Empire. Despite these moments of accord and resolution, three Jewish revolts would follow. See Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian A Study in Political Relations* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

A second anti-Jewish theme in the Santiago narratives is the use of financial leverage by the Jews to achieve their goals to have Santiago arrested and executed. It was the Jews “with their money who corrupted and purchased Lisias and Teocrito, Roman Centurions” so that they could “arrest Santiago.”¹⁵⁹ These specifics suggest that the Romans only intervened when presented with corrupting money. Eventually, “a rope was placed around [Santiago’s] neck and he was taken to King Herodes son of Archelao,” who commanded to have his throat slit on the “twenty-fifth day of March.”¹⁶⁰ This order brought much “happiness to the Jews,” who had finally accomplished their mission. Numerous themes and motifs in the martyrdom of Santiago parallel Jesus’ betrayal, punishment, and death under Pontius Pilate. Like Jesus’ betrayal and execution, it was money from the Jews that ultimately triggered the Romans to execute Santiago. Santiago’s story, therefore, reinforced existing sixteenth century Spanish notions of Jews as “Christ-killers.”

After the death of Santiago in Jerusalem, Peter and Paul sent seven newly ordained bishops, namely the *Varones Apostolicos*, to evangelize Spain and continue Santiago’s mission. If Santiago is the patron saint and central religious figure in all of Spain, the *Siete Varones Apostolicos* play a supplementary role, since they were the ones who were ultimately responsible for converting the masses. The *Varones Apostolicos*

¹⁵⁹ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 6. This narrative does not show up in in the New Testament.

¹⁶⁰ The *Breviarium Apostolorum* claims that Santiago was stoned and held under captivity by the Jews; Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 6.

continued to build upon the foundation that Santiago had laid in Hispania in the first century. Seen as the cornerstone of Catholicism in Iberia, Torcato, Tesifonte, Indalecio, Segundo, Eufrazio, Cecilio, and Isicio embarked on a mission to convert the residents of Iberia, most of whom were polytheistic, animistic, or a combination of the two. Each of these evangelists was responsible for spreading the Gospel and baptizing non-Christians in specific localities.¹⁶¹ Although the *Varones Apostólicos* and their successors faced resistance and persecution until the legalization of Christianity with the Edict of Milan in 313, they were able to successfully instill Christianity throughout the Roman province, gradually displacing the pre-existing polytheistic cults and foreign religious influences.

Conflicting details in the narrative make it difficult to ascertain who these disciples were. Some accounts claim that the first converts from Hispania who accompanied Santiago back to Jerusalem were the original *Varones Apostólicos*. For example, a clue from Ariz's chronicle suggests that he thought these loyal disciples were the *Varones Apostólicos* since he stated that San Segundo was "converted in Spain" by the Apostle Santiago and later went to Jerusalem.¹⁶² While this is one interpretation,

¹⁶¹ Gonzalo De Ayora, *Ávila del Rey*, 61.

¹⁶² Luis Ariz, *Historia de las grandezas de la ciudad de Ávila, y sus dos Cuadrillas* (Alcala de Henares: 1607), 27. Like Ciana, Ariz was methodical when mentioning his sources. To support his account of the history of San Segundo, Ariz states that multiple Segundos existed during the Apostolic Age, which was why there were so many discrepancies in the history of Segundo. One of these men was "Segundo Tebano" who lived during the times of "Emperor Diocletian and Maximilian." Another Bishop Segundo existed, but this one oversaw the diocese of Adon and lived under the reign of "Emperor Adrian." For Ariz, there is no confusion – it is simply that other histories of San Segundo up his narratives with others with the same name.

most of the chronicles leave open who these men were, and do not elaborate what they did in Jerusalem. In contrast, De Ayora's history claims that "Saint Peter and Saint Paul, princes of the apostles," had "ordained San Segundo and other companions as bishops in the same episcopal dignity" so that "they may come into Spain to destroy idolatry."¹⁶³ In this account, it appears that San Segundo and his brethren were not originally from Hispania, but rather embarked on an expedition from "Rome to Spain."¹⁶⁴ The origins of the *Varones Apostólicos* is omitted most of the accounts, but whether they were natives of non-natives of Iberia, traditional accounts still crown them as the cornerstone of Catholicism in Spain. Placing aside all the discrepancies, it was in Jerusalem that the *Varones Apostólicos* began their apostolic mission with Santiago to evangelize.

The men took the body of Santiago, which had been discarded and thrown to the dogs after his beheading, and embarked on a mission to Spain. Miraculously, the ship was guided through the Mediterranean, up the western coast of Iberia, and up a river to arrive at a small town in Galicia.¹⁶⁵ There, the apostles petitioned the local Queen, Loba, for a tiny plot of land to bury the apostle. As a pagan, Loba was unreceptive and suspicious of the foreigners, and had them placed in captivity. Through the intercession of angels, however, the apostles were set free. Having witnessed a series of miracles, Loba converted to Christianity and was baptized with a shell. Having received grace in

¹⁶³ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Ávila del Rey*, 60.

¹⁶⁴ Luis Ariz, *Historia de las grandezas de Ávila*, 28.

¹⁶⁵ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 11.

her new found faith, Loba ordered the destruction of pagan idols and symbols. Her conversion marked a key turning point in the proliferation of Christianity in Spain, which is one of the reasons why the symbol of the shell is placed along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. After the burial of Santiago and successful conversion of Loba, the seven *Varones Apostolicos* ventured off throughout the land to preach the gospel.

One of these *Varones Apostolicos*, San Segundo, made his way to a town called Abula, which, some later chroniclers translated as Avila.¹⁶⁶ It was in this context that San Segundo paved the way for the city's Christianization by establishing a community of believers. Like the other seven *Varones Apostolicos*, San Segundo began "preaching the true faith of the Savior."¹⁶⁷ He "elevated the banner of Christ and sustained it with much devotion," which led to the conversion of the locals.¹⁶⁸ After preaching the Gospel and converting the locals, San Segundo founded the "ancient parish which is outside the walls of the city" near the Adaja River.¹⁶⁹ The site of this first parish, which had been inhabited by "Barbarian Nations and Idolaters," was designated at this spot, and San Segundo "introduced the divine sacrifice of the mass."¹⁷⁰ According to De Ayora's

¹⁶⁶ Historians have noted that Abula was actually present day Abila, not Avila. As a result, the stories revolving around San Segundo may not at all be associated with present day Avila. Félix Ferrer García, *La invención de la Iglesia*, 57.

¹⁶⁷ Luis Ariz, *Historia de las grandezas de Ávila*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Ávila del Rey*, 62.

¹⁶⁹ Luis Ariz, *Historia de las grandezas de Ávila*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

history, this spot was where “the first cathedral church of Spain and of the greater part of the west” was built.¹⁷¹ Upon his death, his loyal disciples of Avila buried his body in the same Church that he had founded.

From antiquity to the sixteenth century, the body remained in Avila, and Cianca contends that a devout community of believers guarded the holy site and protected it from invaders. By the eighth century, Muslim forces invaded Spain, capturing strategically positioned cities and establishing a caliphate in Cordoba, overthrowing the Visigothic Kingdoms.¹⁷² The Christians in central Iberia who survived the invasions and did not flee to the “mountains in the north” became “subjects under the Moors.”¹⁷³ They were, in the words of Cianca, “more or less, oppressed,” since they were “tributaries and subjects,” who had to “serve what had been commanded to them.”¹⁷⁴ Christians under Islamic rule consented, to pay tribute to their new overlords so that they could “receive the holy sacraments.”¹⁷⁵ “The population of the city of Avila” according to Cianca,

¹⁷¹ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Historia de las grandezas de Ávila*, 62. The claim that this Church was the first in the Western World drew the ire of other early modern historians. Garibay, an official historian of the Crown, censured that this claim. Chroniclers in Aragon were pushing for a narrative that the Church of Our Lady of the Pillar of Zaragoza was the first Church in all of Spain. Thus, Ariz’s detail had to yield to more powerful ecclesiastical forces in Spain. *Historia de las grandezas de Ávila*.

¹⁷² Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

¹⁷³ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 54

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

“conforms” to the belief that many churches existed during the time of the moors, one of which was the ancient church which housed the remains of San Segundo.¹⁷⁶ Through divine protection, the small community of oppressed Christians stored his relics and kept it under their protection – safeguarding it from the conquests and battles which ravaged the lands. Thus, “the first church in Avila,” as reported by Cianca, persisted in their faith and the “Christians of that time until now, it has been observed, following the tradition that had been received.”¹⁷⁷ Since the time of San Segundo, the lineage of Christian activity was supposedly unbroken despite the unremitting invasions and subjugation by occupying forces.

Throughout the medieval period, the remains were left untouched and concealed within the church near the Adaja River, and popular veneration of the place of his burial seems to have been minimal. Cathedral, city council, and notarial records do not indicate if any form of popular devotion towards the saint existed. The absence of such records, however, does not necessarily suggest that *abulenses* in the late medieval period were unaware of San Segundo. Medieval altar pieces and other religious artefacts suggest that he formed a part of the historical knowledge of the people, which other local historians have also confirmed.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁸ Arribas, *Historia de San Segundo*; Ferrer García, *La invención de la Iglesia*.

San Segundo went from a relatively unknown saint to a man of popular devotion in the sixteenth century. A construction project to remodel the church of San Sebastián proved to be a key turning point in this history. The arches and wall in the inner apse were planned to be remodeled.¹⁷⁹ During the deconstruction near the apse, the body of San Segundo was found behind one of the walls. On 4 February, 1520, the *corregidor* presented a “key to the sepulcher of San Segundo,” which was then placed in the “ark of the council.” Earlier records mention altars and sites devoted to San Segundo; however, February 1520 is the first date that hints at the discovery of his sepulcher.

After the miraculous discovery of his body during the pestilence of 1519, the Church of San Sebastian and Santa Lucía was converted to a place of veneration for San Segundo and a cult around the saint proliferated in the early 1520s. On 1 February, 1520, the Dean and the cathedral chapter held a meeting to discuss “the matters pertaining to the body of San Segundo,” which was the first time that such a meeting was ever recorded. In the following years, the sepulcher and the items found within it gained popular approval and veneration. The holy objects found within the sepulcher were believed to have healing powers, which the ecclesiastical hierarchy endorsed. The cathedral chapter on 16 January, 1523, for example, gave permission for the use of “the ring of Sant [*sic*] Segundo to comfort the sick.” Throughout the sixteenth century, residents flocked to visit the site of his burial, and the confraternity of San Segundo

¹⁷⁹ Ferrer García, *La invención de la Iglesia*, 19.

established him as the most revered saint for the *abulenses* in the sixteenth century.¹⁸⁰ It is not surprising, then, that when pestilence struck the city or when residents became sick, they made a journey to the sepulcher of San Segundo, which, according to notarial records, healed the sick and blind. Spiritual devotion towards the saint grew not only in Avila, but also the region. Neighboring cities began requesting the items found within the Sepulcher. On 2 April, 1529, for example, the cathedral chapter granted permission to a group of petitioners to “take the ring of San Segundo to Segovia for four days.”¹⁸¹ Multiple references from the 1520s indicate that a cult around San Segundo was began to emerge as signs, streets, and churches began to be named after the saint.

With the miraculous discovery of his relics, a sequence of visual, symbolic changes swept Avila. Vincent Ferrer García argues that with a newly uncovered connection to the ancient past, names of streets and buildings changed to “San Segundo.”¹⁸² Altars were installed inside the cathedral to honor San Segundo. An insignia dedicated to San Segundo was placed on the cathedral shield, linking the cathedral to the apostolic past. The hermitage which, traditionally, was dedicated to San Sebastian and Santa Lucia underwent a transformation as well, as the ancient church was

¹⁸⁰ St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross were, and still continue to be, the most admired and cherished saints of the Discalced Carmelites. While his legacy has long been forgotten in present-day Avila – even though many streets and buildings have been named after him – San Segundo stood as the embodiment of Avila’s Catholic and Apostolic roots, more so than any other figure in its history.

¹⁸¹ *Resumen de Actas de Concejo de Ávila: Vol. 2.* 2 April, 1529.

¹⁸² Ferrer García, *La invención de la iglesia*, 53.

reabeled as the Church of San Segundo. The discovery of the relics of San Segundo changed the official name of many buildings and signs in the early sixteenth century as a cult around the first bishop of Avila flourished.¹⁸³

One would expect the sepulcher of San Segundo to be located in a sacred space that was befitting for the patron Saint of Avila; however, the site of his burial was on the western end of the municipality towards the Adaja river, which, as has already been discussed, was regarded as an unclean place. Since it was a social space for laborers such as “millers, cloth shearers, tanner, and shoe makers,” it was not befitting for the relics of the first bishop of Avila.¹⁸⁴ Tanneries above this area processed animal hides, which was a laborious task that involves numerous steps of hair removal, degreasing, and soaking in a solution. Leather workers dumped the byproduct from this process into the streets, which produced an unbearable stench. The odiferous liquids eventually ended up in the Adaja River next to the “ancient church” where San Segundo was buried.¹⁸⁵ This sunken down portion of the city outside of the walls, which was bombarded with the stench of disease-ridden animal hides and tallow, was not the ideal location for the remains of the first bishop of Avila.

While the natural layout of the city contributed to cleanliness and filthiness of certain spaces, social and moral stigmas were fixed to these spaces. Jodi Bilinkoff

¹⁸³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Gonzalo de Ayora, *Ávila del Rey*, 62.

eloquently said that the relics of San Segundo for an extended period of time remained “in a peripheral neighborhood where thieves and prostitutes mingled with artisans and visiting peasants, the incessant sounds of mills grinding grain and fulling cloth filled the air, and the unpleasant smells of tanned leather, dyestuffs, and manure filled the nostrils.”¹⁸⁶ Travelers often frequented these areas. Fixed to the physical spaces was a social and cultural stigma. It was more than the smell and sight, but also a moral dirtiness. Recognizing the filth and social stigma of this area, residents made numerous complaints in the sixteenth century about the location of the church, citing that it was difficult to access, especially during epidemics when makeshift fences were setup to block outsiders from entering the city. More than filthiness and morally questionable behavior, the church of San Segundo was located just outside of the Jewish quarter, which was established in 1480. This Church was in a poor location, prompting powerful members from the community to call for the relocation of the relics of San Segundo to a socially and financially vibrant sector of the city. For Avila’s religious communities, physical, moral, and religious have-nots occupied these spaces, alongside their beloved San Segundo. It is an ironic spatial history, but one that speaks volumes about the coexistence of two seemingly opposing discourses occupying the same space.

By the early sixteenth century, *abulenses* drew upon the religious signs, symbols, and stories of anti-Jewish discourse during epidemics. Thus, when epidemics of plague struck Avila, it was these stories that served as a cathartic response, since there was no

¹⁸⁶ Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*.

Jews to persecute. The second chapter discusses how these stories were actually used during an epidemic. When the *abulenses* built altars dedicated to San Segundo, visited his sepulcher, retold his stories of conversion, an anti-Jewish discourse was present since it was an integral component of the history of San Segundo.

Conclusion:

The Catholic Monarchs, the royal agent who supervised the relocation of Jews, *regidores* of the city council, residents who filed complaints about the stench of the *Judería*, and the chroniclers of the sixteenth century contributed to the reshaping of the perceptions of Jewishness during the advent of the Alhambra Decree and decades after the expulsion. The popular perception that the *Judería* was an unsanitary district lingered for years even after the forceful departure of Jews.

Anti-Jewish sentiments still resonated with the communities of Avila, reemphasized by the discovery of the sepulcher of San Segundo. At the height of an epidemic in 1519, construction workers made an unexpected discovery of the remains of San Segundo, the first bishop of Avila who introduced Christianity to the city. Shortly after this miraculous discovery, the sepulcher of San Segundo became a site of veneration as pilgrims were healed of their infirmities and disabilities. The relics quickly became a source of comfort and divine protection, and equally, connected Avila to its Catholic, apostolic roots – free from any apostasies and heresies. In Catholicism, particularly in the medieval and early modern period, holy places were often separated from the

wickedness of the world. Art and architecture helped to distinguish these sanctified zones so that residents could easily distinguish the spiritual from the secular. What is exceptional about the location of the San Segundo's body is that even though it was one of the most sacred sites of Avila during most of the sixteenth century, it was in a physical area that was associated with physical and spiritual "uncleanliness" since it was in the neighborhood of the Jews.

While the discovery of the relics and popular devotion have been recorded, the person of San Segundo is questionable.¹⁸⁷ Some historians have argued that San Segundo never even existed; nevertheless, the power behind his legend shaped the interpretive model through which the *abulenses* attached significance to deliverance from epidemics, which was closely tied to their Catholic identity.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Historians, anthropologists and art historians are doubtful if San Segundo – or even the story concerning his deeds – actually existed. His stories of establishing a church in Avila are unverifiable and even the items discovered in his tomb are from the late medieval period. "a chalice with his patena of metal, and a ring of gold, with sapphire mounted in it, and letters which say SANCTUS SECUNDUS" were discovered alongside Segundo's body, which was dressed in episcopal garb. Contemporary archeological, artistic, and linguistic analyses of these religious items have revealed that they are from the fourteenth century. The chalice of San Segundo, for example, has the name "Andrea Petrucci," inscribed, with a subtext stating, "born in Sienna, made this chalice" in medieval Italian script. The episcopal ring, which was enameled with sapphire and made from gold, does not, in any stretch of the imagination, fit the profile of a first century Christian evangelist. Their use became more common only in the early medieval period. See Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 102; Parada López de Corselas, *El Cáliz de San Segundo*, 111; *El cáliz de San Segundo de la catedral de Ávila* (Ávila: Institución Gran Duque de Alba, 1997).

¹⁸⁸ Even though an overwhelming corpus of evidence suggests these are likely not the remains of a first century bishop, traditionalists contend that the body was hidden away for safe storage during the Islamic Invasions. The faithful hid his body to protect it from the Muslims and later returned it back into its rightful place after the Reconquest and

Holy relics and objects – which possessed multiple layers of historical significance for the *abulenses*, most especially an anti-Jewish motif – were integral components to the city’s history and spirituality, and therefore, played a key role in the autochthonous rituals, particularly those used during epidemics. *Abulenses* turned to the relics of San Segundo and the host *Santo Niño de la Guardia* during the epidemic of 1519. The act of seeking deliverance from the pestilence by participating in rituals with these artefacts helped to coalesce civic identity. Despite the physical absence of Jews in Avila, local holy objects and neighborhoods still carried their presence.

repopulation of Avila. Parada López de Corselas states that Melgar y Alvarez de Abrué (1922) and Martín Carramolino (1872: pp 120-121) are the basis for the “traditional idea,” *El Cáliz de San Segundo*, 91.

CHAPTER 2

Holy Objects and Wholly Healing: The Pestilence of 1519

In 1517 the Pestilence of Valladolid, as it was called by its contemporaries, first began in Valladolid and then swept across the Iberian Peninsula, inflicting damage until 1519. Historians of Spain make passing references to this epidemic, usually in the context of demographic analyses, when narrating events of the early sixteenth century; however, to date, no study has examined the cultural and social responses to this disaster. This chapter seeks to establish a more detailed chronology of events while analyzing Avila's public health measures and spiritual responses during the crisis.

The records suggest that late medieval and Renaissance theories about changes in planetary movements and astrological signs, or about the sudden proliferation of insects and animals, had little to no influence on preventative and curative measures in Avila in the early sixteenth century. Since antiquity, astrological and natural signs had played a key role for European medical experts seeking to comprehend the causes of plague. Andres de Laguna, a Spanish humanist doctor, explained in his *Discurso Breve Sobre la Cura y Preservacion de la Pestilencia* of 1556 how comets and other cosmic objects acted as indicators that could forecast when an epidemic would strike. His explanations on the pestilence extended beyond the calculations of celestial movements and also utilized ecological signs to make predictions. The unexpected appearance of wildlife such as "frogs, toads, locusts, snakes, beetles, mice, worms, and other thousand scattered bugs throughout the land" were important clues that signaled that an outbreak was

imminent.¹⁸⁹ Such signs, both cosmic and terrestrial, pointed to the root causes of the illnesses. Laguna's theories were part of a broader pre-Pasteurian medical intellectual culture, which, following in the traditions of Italian Renaissance physicians, used astrological, ecological and biological signs as a register to better explicate the etiologies of disease. These signs, however, played virtually no role in determining the causes of plague in Avila in 1519.

Rather, a series of emergency public health ordinances from 1518-1519 in Avila reveals that authorities identified two possible sources of the outbreak: foreigners visiting from areas effected by plague, and toxic fumes emanating from polluted waters and trash. The council relied on the walls of Avila – which was initially constructed as a defensive military fortification against the moors during the *Reconquista* – to act as a barrier to prevent foreign bodies from entering the city and stationed guards to monitor the gates and roads. Complementing such ordinances, that council in 1519 implemented a plan to eliminate all of the disease-ridden filth of the streets and plazas seeking to prohibit the free movement of animals through the city center, remove and clean the pigsties, forbid the slaughtering of animals within populated areas, and prevent tanneries from dumping foul-smelling sewage into the streets. After the town criers publicly proclaimed these ordinances in crowded plazas and districts, the municipality further sought to purify the air by starting several bonfires using rosemary and other pleasant smelling herbs. Their

¹⁸⁹ “ranas, sapos, langostas, culebras, escarayajos, ratones, lombrizes, y otras mil savandijas esparzidas por la haz de la tierra.” Andrés de Laguna *Discurso Breve Sobre la cura y preservación de la pestilencia* (1556), 16

intention was to purify and incense the air with the aromatic smoke emanating from the fires, which were strategically positioned in densely inhabited areas and near public places of gathering.

Local histories on Avila, when referencing plague, have often looked at the religious charities, confraternities, and hospitals as the organizations responsible for attending to the needs of the sick. While this interpretation is partially correct, the hospitals in Avila simply did not have the necessary resources to accommodate all the infirm during epidemics. Given that most hospitals had less than a dozen beds in any given decade during the sixteenth century, it would not have been possible to house even a fraction of those who fell ill. Furthermore, the principal hospital of Avila that treated those suffering from plague — the Hospital de Dios Padre (a plague hospital) — did not officially begin its operations until 1532.¹⁹⁰ While the constitutions of the hospitals of Avila state that their mission was to treat the sick, these medical establishments were ill-equipped to deal with the countless number of plague victims.

Ultimately, my research shows that the council of Avila, which consisted primarily of fourteen *regidores* who were of noble rank, acted as the chief administrative unit that executed public health policies during the 1517-1519 outbreak, not the hospitals — which at the time were managed by the cathedral chapter. Implementing public health policies, however, was not strictly in the hands of the *regidores*. Conflict soon arose between the council of Avila and the cathedral chapter, highlighting how responsibilities

¹⁹⁰ Andrés Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila*.

for controlling specific plague-related ordinances could change hands through formal complaints and negotiations. Ultimately, it was the *corregidor* – the official representative and voice of the Crown in Avila – who exercised his authority to resolve this dispute between the two institutions. All plague-related ordinances before, during, and after the outbreak in 1519 point to the fact that authority to manage public health was diffuse and could always be challenged or even ignored. This epidemic therefore unveils power dynamics within the complex oligarchical social structure of Avila. The second section of this chapter will elaborate the details of how the implementation of municipal public health ordinances was a complex process, since financial interests and older rivalries often influenced the decision-making rationale of the nobility.

In conjunction with physical treatments and preventative measures against plague, medieval forms of spirituality – which focused on holy objects of healing – provided another way to respond to the epidemic by reinvigorating memories of an idealized, pure Christian past. Two related cases will be examined in the third section. The first was the use of the desecrated Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* in an eight-day Corpus Christi procession in 1519 to petition God for healing and deliverance. The Eucharist of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* became the centerpiece of devotion during the outbreak. An examination of the history of this Eucharist reveals deeply rooted anti-Jewish sentiments inflamed by stories of ritual murder of innocent Christian children. By using this Host, participants were reminded of the indestructibility and miraculous powers of the Eucharist, which could perhaps save them from the anguish of the plague, as well. The second arose from the miraculous discovery of the relics of San Segundo – the second

generation apostolic bishop who founded Christianity in Avila – during the year of the outbreak. This discovery demonstrates that the community of believers still maintained and reaffirmed their belief in the healing powers of saintly relics. Moreover, the discovery of the relics of San Segundo reemphasized the long history of Avila's rich Catholic legacy. The remains of San Segundo became a site of worship as the sick approached the body to be healed of their illnesses. In the years that followed this discovery, a cult for San Segundo and reverence for the holy objects found in his tomb (patina, chalice, and ring.) gained popularity in Avila and in other regions throughout Spain. Both of these cases draw attention to holy matter that was used as a tool to heal, but also as an object for remembering an idealized Christian past.

Before examining these themes, I will sketch out a chronology of the pestilence of Valladolid and place it within a broader context of other epidemics and pandemics that were occurring concurrently throughout the Mediterranean, Europe and the New World – sites of Spanish conquest and political influence.

Broadening the Scope of the Discussion: A Tale of Two Pandemics (1518-1520)?

When discussing the virulence and historical impact of epidemics at the turn of the sixteenth century, scholarly conversations often gravitate towards the debates over the destructiveness of the pandemics in the Americas. When Christopher Columbus and his crew arrived in the Lesser Antilles on their second voyage in 1493, they brought with them a wide array of plants and animals; the newly introduced species permanently

transformed the ecology of the Western Hemisphere, breaking the ecological isolation between the Old and New World.¹⁹¹ Unknowingly, the mariners – and the animals being transported with them – were carriers of lethal microbes. Since these pathogens were foreign to the Caribbean, the indigenous Tainos were, according to some theories, immunologically vulnerable and therefore more likely to contract, spread, and die from the imported diseases.¹⁹² This conveyance of Old World diseases to the New World forever altered, on an unparalleled level, the established indigenous social and political structures. For decades, academics have sought to quantify the loss of indigenous life of the Caribbean after the arrival of Columbus, with some experts citing mortality rates as high as 8,000,000 or as low as 60,000.¹⁹³ Even though the numbers remain debatable, one fact is seemingly incontrovertible: fifty years after the second voyage, the natives of

¹⁹¹ Scholars refer to the sixteenth century introduction of plants, animals, and microorganisms from the Old World to the New – and vice versa – as the Columbian Exchange, a term popularized by Alfred Crosby in his magisterial work *the Columbian Exchange*.

¹⁹² A society exposed to a newly introduced disease is more immunologically vulnerable than a population which has already had contact with the same disease, which explains why the natives suffered higher fatality rates from small pox and other epidemics than the Conquistadors. This “Virgin Soil” argument – a term coined by Alfred Crosby – gained acceptance among many historians, anthropologists, and epidemiologists. Historians have challenged this thesis, arguing that analyzing the virulence of disease outside of the historical context of colonialism has its inherent flaws. Paul Kelton argued, “aspects of colonialism heightened Native vulnerability to infection and mortality. In other words, epidemics and massive death tolls among indigenous peoples occurred not simply due to their virginity to European- and African-introduced germs,” *Epidemics and Enslavement Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast 1492-1715* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), xvii.

¹⁹³ Noble Cook, “Disease and the Depopulation of Hispaniola, 1492-1518,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 2 (1993): 213-245.

the Caribbean became nearly extinct.¹⁹⁴ While Spanish military conquests were partially responsible for the abrupt and tragic loss of life,¹⁹⁵ Old World pathogens were the principal culprit of this sudden and catastrophic death toll that forever reshaped the historical trajectory of the Caribbean.¹⁹⁶

The rapid proliferation and diffusion of Old World pathogens had an equally explosive effect on the North and South American mainland, disrupting the ebbs and flows of daily indigenous life.¹⁹⁷ One of the most pivotal events, and the one which is most frequently cited by historians, was the Spanish conquest of Aztec territories. After Montezuma's death, Hernán Cortes and his allies suffered an embarrassing military defeat at the hands of the remaining Aztec forces in June of 1520, which was infamously dubbed *La Noche Triste* (i.e. the Sorrowful Night). As the skirmishes continued,

¹⁹⁴ Noble Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

¹⁹⁵ Gérard Chaliand *Mirrors of a Disaster: The Spanish Military Conquest of America*, trans. A.M. Berrett (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005)

¹⁹⁶ Noble Cook in *Born to Die* eloquently stated, "The foreign pathogens were active, winnowing the people more quickly even than the sword or arquebus could, and certainly much more silently and effectively." Pg. 95.

¹⁹⁷ Although dated, Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian exchange* is a seminal monograph that cogently summarizes the ecological impact of the exchange of Old World and New World plants, animals, and microbes. While this list is far from exhaustive, for a more thorough overview of this topic, see Hugh Thomas' magnum Opus *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortes, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Alfred Crosby "Conquistador y Pestilencia: The First New World Pandemic and the Fall of the Great Indian Empires," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLVII (1967), 321-343.

however, smallpox – which had already arrived and made its way to the mainland among infected Spanish soldiers, diplomats and animals – began to spread in and near the territories of the Aztecs, causing havoc that gave the Conquistadors a strategic military advantage. The ubiquity of sickness eventually led to incalculable casualties. The Mexica who survived the initial outbreak were left incapacitated due to the breakdown of the food production and the trading of goods,¹⁹⁸ which made the Aztecs even more vulnerable to the subsequent colonizing Spanish forces. Over the next several decades, airborne diseases such as influenza, smallpox, and measles, and diseases communicated through intermediate vectors such as typhus, bubonic plague, yellow fever, and malaria, spread throughout South and North America, inflicting further damage on the indigenous populations.¹⁹⁹

These watershed events of the long sixteenth century have gripped scholarly attention for several generations, but this historical focus has, as an unintended result, overshadowed discussions of the similarly transformative nature of epidemics on European society. In recent years, however, intellectual curiosity about Old World epidemics, specifically outbreaks of plague, has motivated academics, who have begun raising important questions concerning how and in what ways composite monarchies,

¹⁹⁸ While this interpretation might be problematic for some historians, engaging in the nuances of the demographic trends and issues of the “sudden collapse” theory is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a brief, yet critical analysis of the inherent flaws of the historiography of demographic collapse after Cortes’ Conquest of the Aztecs, see Francis J. Brooks’ article “Revising the Conquest of Mexico: Smallpox, Sources, and Populations,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 (Summer, 1993), 1-29.

¹⁹⁹ Noble Cook, *Born to Die*, 96.

municipalities, official and unofficial medical institutions, and religious organizations reacted to and interpreted these disasters.²⁰⁰ A central shortcoming of this burgeoning sub-field, however, is that no study has thoroughly examined the geographical extent of Old World epidemics that happened concurrently with the pandemics of the New World. When juxtaposing these newly emerging studies of Old World plague outbreaks with the pandemics in the New World, it becomes evident that microbes had an even greater global transformative role in the years between 1518-1520 than scholars had first imagined.

This section maps some of the European and Mediterranean epicenters of disease outbreaks from 1518-1520. This geographical overview will situate Avila in the context of Iberian, Mediterranean, European, and American epidemics and pandemics. After framing Avila on a global scale, I will then highlight the political and religious peculiarities of Avila's response in the sections that follow.

One of the earliest records of the 1518 plague in Spain suggests that the origins of this epidemic date back to 1517, when outbreaks were reported in Old Castile, specifically in towns and villages near Valladolid.²⁰¹ Although the precise point of origin

²⁰⁰ In strictly numerical terms, the demographic decline of the Americas far surpasses mortality rates from disease suffered by Europeans. While fluctuations in birthrates and life expectancy has produced some scholarly disagreements, these debates, in my view, pale in comparison to the arguments concerning New World demography.

²⁰¹ Relying strictly upon textual evidence to confirm that an epidemic was caused by plague has been problematic since the records only provide details of signs and symptoms, which ultimately leaves room for doubt. With the advent of DNA testing, scholars can know what bacterium or virus was responsible for the death. Historians, archaeologists, and paleopathologists have collaborated to confirm the presence of

of the pestilence cannot be known with certainty, contemporary and later early modern historical accounts indicate that Valladolid was one of the first major Spanish cities to experience heavy casualties.²⁰² One of the earliest and most detailed narratives of this epidemic appears in Fray Prudencio de Sandoval's *Historia de la vida y hechos del Emperador Carlos V*, which chronicles the decisive moments of the reign of Charles V – including the devastation of Valladolid from the pestilence.²⁰³ While Sandoval lays out a basic chronology and sequence of events, multiple questions still remain unanswered, largely because historians have not cross-checked municipal records and correspondence from Valladolid to verify any of Sandoval's claims.²⁰⁴ Thus, the first objective is to cross-reference key details in his account to contemporary demographic studies in order to determine when and where this epidemic originated – details which must be established in order to sketch a timeline for the outbreak in Avila.

Yersinia Pestis for many early modern Epidemics up to the nineteenth century. Historical, archaeological, and DNA evidence has left no doubt that early modern physicians and record keepers accurately determined plague. See “Historical *Y.pestis* Genomes Reveal the European Black Death as the Source of Ancient and Modern Plague Pandemics.” *Cell host & microbe*, 8 June 2016; 19(6): 874-81

²⁰² Bilinkoff, *The Teresa of Avila*, 53-54

²⁰³ Prudencio Sandoval, *Historia de la Vida y Hechos del Emperador Carlos V* (Pamplona: Casa de Bartholome Paris, 1614).

²⁰⁴ “official histories,” according to Richard Kagan, “is often equated with propaganda, that is information (or misinformation) that its producers know is distorted or false,” *Clio & the Crown*, 4. Since Sandoval's history favorably narrates the life of Charles V, some historians may discard the veracity of any claims in the text. While his work may advance Charles V's political agenda and legacy, his descriptions concerning the outbreak were a report of a non-political event during Charles V's reign. In short, he would have no reason to lie or exaggerate his narrative on the pestilence.

Sandoval's history marks Christmas of 1517 as the starting point of the epidemic in Valladolid. At that time, the residents had just finished celebrating the end of the Advent season with merriment and public festivities. Sandoval, however, lamented that "in this life there is no pleasure," and after days of joyful celebration, "a great pestilence entered" Valladolid.²⁰⁵ By the time locals recognized that a severe pestilence was sweeping through the city, it was already too late to setup a cordon or isolate the city, since bodies had already begun to pile up. Sandoval reported that "there were some days where thirty or forty bodies" had to be buried, which placed an enormous strain on local infrastructure.²⁰⁶ Death, so it seemed, was omnipresent, and no inhabitant of Valladolid could avoid its horror: "it was certain that when one enters into some homes everyone was dead, without a single person alive."²⁰⁷ The only path to survival, it appeared, was to abandon the city, leading to its depopulation: "Valladolid became depopulated, forcing the people to flee from death, which is a terrible enemy."²⁰⁸ Through these rich descriptions, we can sense the terror and panic of the residents in the winter of 1517-1518; however, Sandoval's text must be approached with some caution, since he drafted his history decades after the epidemic. By cross-referencing his account with modern demographic studies and early sixteenth century documents from the Iberian Peninsula

²⁰⁵ Sandoval, *Historia de la Vida*, 85

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

however, it is possible to verify, with a reasonable degree of certainty, the accuracy of his chronology.

Regions in Old Castile experienced steady population growth up until 1517 – growth which immediately halted once the outbreak was in full swing.²⁰⁹ Determining precise mortality rates for this epidemic is methodologically problematic.²¹⁰ In 1564 the Council of Trent required local parishes to quantify – through meticulous documentation and record keeping – baptisms and marriages, files which have become fundamental for deducing demographic ebbs and flows.²¹¹ In contrast, establishing reliable mortality rates for any epidemic prior to the Council of Trent poses methodological issues largely because of the absence of detailed baptismal, marriage, and death records.²¹² The

²⁰⁹ Beginning in the 1970s and through the 1980s, academics in Spain analyzed records to create population statics. Vicente Pérez Moreda's *Las Crisis de Mortalidad en la Espana Interior (Siglos XVI-XIX)* is a voluminous synthesis of multiple demographic studies. Mercedes Lazaro Ruiz's *Las Crisis de Mortalidad en La Rioja* focuses on precise figures of La Rioja but contextualizes his research within the framework of North Atlantic famines, epidemics and birth rates. For Avila, Serafin Tapia Sánchez, "Las Fuentes Demográficas y el Potencial Humano de Ávila en el Siglo XVI." *Cuadernos Abulenses* 2 (1984): 31-88. Serafin Tapia Sánchez, "Los factores de la evolución demográfica de Ávila en el siglo XVI," *Cuadernos Abulenses* 5 (1986): 113-200.

²¹⁰ Numerous studies discuss the methodological problems with population studies and their shortcomings. Vicente Pérez Moreda, *Las Crisis de Mortalidad*.

²¹¹ Mercedes Lázaro Ruiz, *La Crisis de Mortalidad en La Rioja*, 13.

²¹² One such example mentioned by Lázaro Ruiz is that *Los Libros de Defunciones* (books concerning death) had a "systematic omission" of infant and juvenile mortality, making it troublesome to determine actual mortality rates of a given outbreak, 14.

foremost experts on early modern Spanish demography have brilliantly navigated through many of these hurdles to provide a reasonable trajectory of population fluctuations. When taking these demographic studies into consideration, all of the research indicates that the period from late 1517 to early 1520 witnessed a population decline due to plague and famine, which, more or less, substantiates the validity of Sandoval's chronology. Contemporary research on demography and other historical research confirms that an outbreak of plague began in Old Castile sometime during the winter of 1517-1518.²¹³

In the months following the initial outbreak, neighboring provinces in Old Castile and cities on the North Atlantic coast of Spain and on the shores of the Mediterranean documented the presence of plague in their municipalities from 1518-1520, which gives more credence to Sandoval's narrative. Court cases in the Basque Country, specifically in Vizcaya, illustrate that litigants in 1518 demanded to see expenses concerning the payment for men who guarded the city during the outbreak, suggesting that the plague had reached the Northern coast of Iberia a few months after the initial outbreak in Valladolid.²¹⁴ On the opposite end of the Atlantic coast at the northwestern corner of Spain, correspondence from Charles V indicates that cities and towns in Galicia were

²¹³ Most epidemics that began usually accuse another region as the starting point of the plague. Tapia Sánchez, "Las Fuentes Demográficas y el Potencial Humano de Ávila en el Siglo XVI," 63. Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 53-54; Luis Ariz, *Historia de Grandezas de Ávila*; Gonzalo De Ayora, *Avila del Rey*, 57-59.

²¹⁴ Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid, Registro de Ejecutorias, Caja 344, fol., 31.

enduring a fierce outbreak in 1519. In his letter to Lopez de Ayala, the Count of Fuensalida, Charles V explained to him that “in the Kingdom of Galicia and areas within the Kingdom, they are dying of the pestilence.”²¹⁵ In the words of Charles’ official correspondence, nearly all of “the kingdom is damaged from the horror.”²¹⁶ On March 14, 1519, Charles V granted Lopez de Ayala permission to flee Galicia because of the “poor health” of the inhabitants and region. Just as regions on the North Atlantic executed policies to attenuate the affliction, the Mediterranean coast, specifically the areas near Valencia, adopted similar strategies to cope with the emergency.²¹⁷ In light of the evidence from various provinces throughout Iberia, Antonio Cianca – the sixteenth century historian and notary of Avila – aptly labelled this outbreak as a “general and great pestilence” in Spain. While his description was accurate for the Iberian Peninsula, the scale of the disaster was, perhaps, even more extensive than he initially described in his chronicle.²¹⁸

North of the Bay of Biscay and the Celtic Sea, London had to cope with a similar catastrophe as Spain. London reported an outbreak in 1518, a disaster which prompted the first royally directed measures to reduce the incidence of plague. Residents, for the

²¹⁵ AHN, Sección Nobleza, Archivo de los Duques de Frías. Caja 21, fol., 55.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Vicente Boix Ricarte, *Historia de la Ciudad y Reino de Valencia: Tomo I* (Valencia: Benito Monfort, 1845), 487.

²¹⁸ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 95.

first time in English history, were ordered to “have a bundle of straw hung outside” their homes to let their neighbors know that someone living in the house had become infected.²¹⁹ Complementing these measures, the English adopted the continental practice of carrying a “white rod four feet long whenever they went out” so that pedestrians could maintain a safe distance.²²⁰ Thereafter, London changed its tactics, mandating the infected to hang the cross of Saint Anthony on the door instead of a bundle of sticks, which proved to be difficult to distinguish.²²¹ These examples highlight a common strategy that was used to control the proliferation of plague: separating the infirm from the healthy through specially designated signs.²²² This English epidemic, according to Stephen Porter, was the first time that royal authorities executed policies and installed new institutions to combat and control outbreaks.²²³ A royal charter signed by Henry VIII granted the Royal College of Physicians authority to grant official license to medical practitioners in order to weed out malpractice.²²⁴ Reports of this epidemic can also be found in Edinburgh, 650km north of London, and in parts of Lothian. The Lords of

²¹⁹ Stephen Porter, *Plagues of London*. (Stroud: The History Press, 2008), 41.

²²⁰ Stephen Porter, *Plagues of London*, 41.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² J.F.D. Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 167.

²²³ Stephen Porter, *Plagues of London*, 41.

²²⁴ Ibid., 42

Edinburgh were unable to hold meetings and the King had to relocate to Dalkieth because of the ferocity of the pestilence.²²⁵

Beyond London other areas in the British Isles and Western Europe recorded plague and other natural disasters in 1518. Famine and poor living conditions appear to have been the precursors for many of these epidemics. The “Dancing Plague” of 1518 in Strasbourg is an example of how anxiety, fear, panic, and mania often accompany catastrophe, causing everyday citizens to participate in atypical communal rituals.²²⁶ In the summer of 1518, hundreds of residents in Strasbourg began to dance continually for days and nights without ceasing, in the hopes of alleviating their current predicament. *Yersinia Pestis* was not responsible for this “Dancing Plague”; rather, it was poor harvests and strenuous living conditions combined with superstitious beliefs, according to John Waller, which triggered this extraordinary and bizarre event that led hundreds to dance to the point of heat exhaustion, stroke, and death. Poor harvests seem to have also contributed to an outbreak in Zurich in August of 1519, which killed approximately a third of Zurich’s population. The plague prompted Zwingli, who fell also ill, to write several poems petitioning God for deliverance from the pestilence.²²⁷

²²⁵ Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague*, 167.

²²⁶ John Waller, *A Time to Dance, a time to Die: The Extraordinary Story of the Dancing Plague of 1518* (London: Icon Books, 2008).

²²⁷ Philip Schaff, “Zwingli during the Pestilence” *History of the Christian Church: Volume XVII*, 43-46.

Areas of the Ottoman Empire – Istanbul and Edirne specifically – first reported outbreaks of plague in 1520, which quite possibly had spread from Western Europe.²²⁸ Nükhet Varlik argues that Ottoman expansion from 1453-1517 formed “a new plague trajectory” through “myriad forms of mobility, including warfare, trade travel and migration.”²²⁹ The proliferation of Ottoman trade networks and urbanization transformed the scale and frequency of plague outbreaks after 1517.²³⁰ Determining whether the same strain of *Yersinia Pestis* was acting throughout the Mediterranean and Western Europe would require extensive paleopathological comparisons. Nevertheless, based on textual evidence, Varlik contends that this “epidemic wave affected a vast area, including the Mediterranean, Europe, England, Scandinavia, Russia, and the Balkans.”²³¹

Even though the Iberian Peninsula sat at the crossroads of these two pandemics in the Western and Eastern hemispheres, it would be too hasty conclude that all of these epidemics originated in Spain. In theory however, if that were the case, it would recast our understanding of the extent of early sixteenth century pandemics. If the plague in the Iberian Peninsula did in fact spread to other areas in Europe and the Middle East, this

²²⁸ For the most comprehensive overview of early modern outbreaks in the Ottoman Empire, see Nükhet Varlik *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For an analysis of reactions to disasters in the Ottoman Empire, see Ayalon, Yaron, *Natural disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine, and other Misfortunes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²²⁹ Varlik Nükhet, 135.

²³⁰ Ibid., 159.

²³¹ Ibid., 164.

undetected historical fact would suggest that the Spaniards were the springboard of two devastating pandemics in the Old and New World. In the same year that plague was surging across Europe and into parts of the Ottoman Empire, Smallpox was weakening the indigenous empires, federations, and tribes of the Americas, causing irreparable damage to their political, social, and economic structures. While more comparative studies would be necessary, this would indicate that Spanish colonial and economic expansion had a greater impact on the dissemination of diseases throughout the world in 1518-1520 than any other empire in human history.

Alienating Contagious Bodies, Decontaminating Spaces, and Escaping Reality

Areas throughout Europe and the Mediterranean were being afflicted by plague in 1519-1520, but Avila, which is located just 120km south of Valladolid, already received warnings of the epidemic in June 1518 – approximately six months after the initial outbreak. Official word of plague was first documented in Avila on June 8, 1518, when the city began to prohibit *abulenses* from granting shelter to “anyone who may come from Valladolid,” which was suffering from the pestilence.²³² After formal news of the epidemic reached the *ayuntamiento*, the local government executed a series of ordinances to protect itself from contagious bodies, sickly travelers, and imported goods, all of which might be sources of infection, in their view. To properly execute this plan,

²³² AMA, actas consistoriales, Caja 2, Libro 2, fols., 136-137.

the council made preparations to hire additional guards and placed the city in a state of disaster readiness. Isolation – in this epidemic and every other one after – represented the first line of defense in Avila, and was perhaps the most practical and effective public health strategy before the emergence of the germ theory of disease in the late nineteenth century.²³³

As the outbreak roared throughout central Spain and began sweeping across the peninsula, Avila's response to shield itself from the sick entering its gates excluded outsiders by marking them as foreign, infectious bodies – a tradition which harkened back to emergency tactics during the Black Death.²³⁴ Two days after the first set of emergency preparations were put in motion, the council ordered the *hidalgos* at the gates to stand vigilant and block the entrance of all peoples and goods coming from the places where there was plague.²³⁵ On July 31, 1518, the council reiterated that order by

²³³ Through his extensive archival research of public health practices of Tuscany and Florence, Carlo Cipolla has demonstrated the success and failures of pre-Pasteurian municipal tactics to handle epidemics. See *Cristofano and the Plague: A study in the History of Public Health in the Age of Galileo*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).

²³⁴ Isolation and quarantine were two strategies that were frequently employed in late medieval and early modern Europe. These strategies, however, were not limited to Europe. Scholars of the Ottoman Empire have argued, quite convincingly, that inhabitants of Muslims territories were not strictly passive recipients of “God’s will.” In many instances they employed similar strategies of fleeing, isolationism, and experimenting with a variety of remedies. See Varlik Nükhet, *Plague and Empire*.

²³⁵ In his article “Las Fuentes Demográficas y el Potencial Humano de Ávila en el siglo XVI,” Serafin Tapia Sánchez, one of the foremost experts on sixteenth century Avila, noted that “Avila pone sus guardas desde octubre de 1518.” Cathedral and municipal records indicate that it was actually a few months earlier. July was when emergency

prohibiting the entrance of contagious bodies “so that they may not enter from the part where they are dying.”²³⁶ The initial orders from the council prohibited sheltering people from Valladolid, those who were sick or appeared sick, or strangers coming from regions where fatalities had been reported. If Sandoval’s account can be trusted, we know that Valladolid “became depopulated” since the epidemic forced “the people to flee from death,” meaning that they were seeking refuge in other places such as Avila.²³⁷ Although turning away foreigners who were in dire need of assistance seems callous and cruel, austere regulations were vital “for the health of the city” and its self-preservation, according to the aldermen.²³⁸

These ordinances effectively created new social boundaries, separating the sick from the healthy and the native from the foreign. As a center of urban and commercial growth during most of the sixteenth century, Avila attracted nobles, artisans, financiers and domestic servants from Castile and other provinces of Spain.²³⁹ These non-natives contributed to a demographic upswing, which in turn fueled a construction and economic boom in the first half of the sixteenth century. This open-door policy – which made Avila a thriving epicenter of cultural and financial exchange – came to an abrupt halt

measures were first put in place. This minor fact does not alter or discredit the argument or the quality of the data in his article. AMA, Caja 2, Libro 2, fol., 144, 218-219

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Sandoval, *Historia de la vida*, 85.

²³⁸ AMA, Caja 2, Libro 2, fol., 145.

²³⁹ Bilinkoff, “Public Works, Private Goals” in *The Avila of Saint Teresa*.

through the ordinances to guard the city against all those suspected of coming from plague-ridden regions. Outsiders were no longer seen as transporters of goods and services, but rather as carriers of disease and misfortune. Throughout the sixteenth century, the label that was commonly used in Spain to describe an area or person effected by plague was *apestado*. It must be stressed, however, that the social marks of “diseased bodies” were only provisional, and evidence shows that these labels were short-lived and dissolved once the epidemic ended. Despite such temporality, areas inside the city walls became a reserved space for residents, and the *apestados* had no access to these social spaces until the crisis had ended. Until that time, Avila continued its mission to install new security checkpoints to filter out the undesirable goods and peoples.

Although it had fortifications in place, the council sought to augment the strength of their stronghold by positioning guards at the outskirts of the municipality alongside the major roads to control and monitor the flow of traffic. On October 23, 1518, the council granted Rodrigo de Herrera authority to appoint men to oversee the checkpoints at the major roads, which effectively extended the protective barrier around Avila even further outside the municipal boundaries. De Herrera hired auxiliary forces to stand as “guards at the roads” to safeguard the arteries that led into the city.²⁴⁰ A short-term contract was prepared, which paid the guards two royal *ducados* in payment for each day of their services. For the following two weeks, the council had to free up an additional “18

²⁴⁰ AMA, Libro 2, 145.

reales for guarding the Camino de San Francisco,” a vital road which connected Avila to the rest of Castile.²⁴¹ In the first three months the local government spared no expense and invested the funds required to prevent all potentially lethal carriers of disease from entering the city.²⁴²

To insulate the city center even more, the council made preparations to seal off all possible entrances – even the smallest passageways – through the installation of new gates and locks, giving the local government of Avila near complete control of all access to and from the city. For example, on November 9, 1518, the council freed up eight *reales* for Cristobal Guillamas, and his companions, who were commissioned with the task of forging a “bolt and key and lock for the wicket gate” adjacent to the cathedral.²⁴³ The council felt it was prudent to keep the bishop’s wicket gate closed “at night and at the hour that the other gates were closed” so that all access points into the city would be completely blockaded to outsiders.²⁴⁴ The municipal records state that “it was ordered to close the wicket gate [of the Bishop] of the said city with the key” for “reasons of the pestilence.”²⁴⁵ Rather than paying a sentinel to periodically check the bishop’s wicket

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Blocking the normal flow of traffic into the city during an epidemic was a normal sixteenth century Spanish phenomenon. Cities, towns, and villages of La Rioja restricted commercial activity and closed “the gates, entrances, and windows.” See Lázaro Ruiz, Mercedes *Las Crisis de Mortalidad en La Rioja (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, 41-44.

²⁴³ AMA, Libro 2, 167.

²⁴⁴ AMA, Libro 2, 163.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

gate, the council determined that installing a lock, key, and bolt on the gate was more cost effective. The key to the newly forged lock was entrusted to “Lord Sancho Sánchez Dávila so that he may have access to closing and opening to the clerics at the hours of Matins.”²⁴⁶ The ultimate purpose of the enhanced fortifications was for the general health and protection of the city, but as these extra costs began to chip away at the coffers of the noblemen and their budget, they searched for more frugal methods to protect the residents, since guarding all the crevices was proving to be costlier than they had initially anticipated.

The newly installed gate, moreover, created obstacles for the clergy, who did not receive a key to the lock; therefore, they could not recite the Liturgy of the Hours at the correctly designated time. After the lock and key were installed “for the city,” the *regidores* “agreed that the said key was not to be given to the hands nor power of any ecclesiastical person since the gates belong to [the council].”²⁴⁷ The divisive language purposefully excluded the clergymen, who as a result could not fulfill all their religious duties. Lord Sancho Sánchez Dávila therefore received the responsibility of unlocking and locking the gate so that the secular and religious clergy could reach their chapel and could recite their Liturgy.²⁴⁸ Dávila, according to the complaints made by the priests,

²⁴⁶ AMA, Libro 2, 173-174.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Matins is a series of prayers recited during the middle of the night until dawn, forming part of the Liturgy of the Hours, also referred to as Divine Office. All secular and

friars, and deacons, did not open the gate at the appropriate hours, and as a result, the clergy could not pray Matins. Furthermore, they lamented that Dávila also did not lock the gate at the appropriate hours, which, in consequence, made the choir of the cathedral accessible to foreigners and other laypersons whose presence was not authorized.

Frustrated and dissatisfied, the clergy aired their complaints in front of the cathedral Chapter since Dávila's negligence could allow for the unhindered entrance of laypersons and foreigners into the cathedral choir, meaning that outsiders from areas afflicted by the plague could bypass the guards and enter the insider of the city through the wicket gate.

The perturbed clergy griped that:

[The men of the council of Avila] have confirmed in the statute that no layperson may enter the choir where one says the hours of the liturgy in order to avoid scandal and perturbation of the divine office [...] It was here in this city that the said statute was not observed. Nor were people prevented from entering the said choir. Rather everyone, like the foreigners in this city, are able to enter the choir at whatever hour and time that they want.²⁴⁹

The purpose of the lock and gate was to seal off Avila from outsiders; however, Dávila's failure to monitor the gate generated tensions between the local church and government.

religious clergy are required to recite the Liturgy of the Hours on a daily basis. For more information, see "Divine Office" in the Catholic Encyclopedia. www.newadvent.org.

²⁴⁹ "por quanto ellos abian hecho en estatuto e le avian confirmado que nyngun lego entre en el coro donde se dice las hora por evitar escandalo y pertubacion de los divinos oficios que ellos agora mandaban e mandaron que, por quanto estava en esta ciudad el consejo real de sus altesas que, mientras estubiese en esta ciudad que no se guarde el dicho estatuto, ni se evite persona alguna, que no entre en el dicho coro si quisiere, sino que todos, asi los estranjeros como los de la cudad, pyedan entrar en el dicho coro a qualquier hor e tiempo que quisiere y asi lo mandavan e mandaron." ACA, Tomo 2, 52.

Infuriated by the lack of respect for the Divine Office and the holy spaces within the cathedral, the clergy took their complaints directly to the *corregidor*.

As an agent and representative of the Crown, the *corregidor* exercised royally derived authority over the nobles of Avila who sat on the council. After hearing the grievances from the clergy, the *corregidor* informed the council that he “had given to the Dean of this church a key to the *Puerta del Albardería* because [the clergy] don’t cease to say the divine office, especially matins.”²⁵⁰ While public health policies and security were normally in the hands of council of Avila, the *corregidor* extended his responsibility to the local church by giving them a key to the lock and entrusting them to open and close it at their discretion. This conflict and its resolution makes visible the subtle dynamics of power among the nobility, the cathedral chapter, and the representatives from the crown, demonstrating that valid protests and negotiations could amend and even overturn emergency plague-related ordinances.

Several weeks after the emergency security forces had been stationed at all access points, patience was wearing thin for all parties involved in the *guarda de peste*. With no reports of death or signs of illness in and near Avila, the council grew more and more frustrated at having to pay for extra sentinels. Initially, two royal *ducados* were paid to the guards for each day of service²⁵¹ and two *reales* each week to the people who were

²⁵⁰ The Puerta de Albadería is located on what is now called Calle de San Segundo, which is one of the main streets adjacent to the Cathedral. ACA, Tomo 2, 175.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 165.

entrusted with “closing the doors of the city.”²⁵² On December 29, 1518, a municipal order demanded that the guards go to the consistory to discuss the “excessive salary which [the guards] receive.”²⁵³ The details of the negotiations, unfortunately, were not recorded. One can, however, deduce that the nobles had grown complacent, since no signs of the epidemic were present in the Province of Avila. Behind closed doors the two parties struck a deal, and payments of an undisclosed amount were made to the gatekeepers on the January 4, 1519.

Exactly two weeks after the guards reached a settlement with the council, a municipal proclamation declared that “the guards of the roads are to be removed because the land is already healthy; and therefore, the guards must not be paid.”²⁵⁴ From June of 1518 to January 1519, a few costly measures had been implemented to block the entrance of contagious bodies. Six months of stagnant economic activity with no signs of an epidemic undoubtedly influenced the magistrates’ decision. By mid-January of 1519 the council disbanded all the guards and declared the lands of Avila as “healthy,” although I suspect their hasty judgment was driven by a desire to resume commerce and production more than to protect lives. Business could, for the most part, return to normal and lively trade could recommence. Even though the council disbanded all the guards and declared Avila safe however, they continued to promulgate ordinances designed to prevent the

²⁵² Ibid., 174.

²⁵³ Ibid., 177.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 180.

spread of bad odors through a reaffirmation of older municipal ordinances on public cleanliness.

Public concern for cleanliness reflected the alternate view that pestilence could originate from other, non-foreign sources, namely, miasma. Although multiple and disparate theories on the origins of plague existed in the early sixteenth century, the dominant European medical concept postulated that plague came from miasma, which are toxic airs.²⁵⁵ In Spain miasmatic theories on the causes of plague were articulated in Fernando Alvarez's 1507 treatise *Regimiento Contra La Peste*, which provided advice on the origins, prevention, treatment, and possible cures of the plague. Alvarez's theories borrowed heavily from a long tradition of medical experts dating back to Hippocrates and Galen. For centuries European medical experts postulated that the foul smelling odors emanating from trash, sewage, old food, animal carcasses, spoiled grain, or other rotten items disrupted the balance of the body's four humors.²⁵⁶ Following that tradition, Alvarez warned his readers that the "corruption in the air makes pestilence in human bodies."²⁵⁷ If corrupted and harmful air were the cause of illness, it was imperative to

²⁵⁵ For a general overview on late medieval perceptions of health, see Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Modern Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). Dozens of Spanish medical treatises from the early sixteenth century also confirms this view.

²⁵⁶ For a concise explanation on humourism in medieval and renaissance medical thought, see Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine*.

²⁵⁷ Fernando Alvarez, *Regimiento Contra La Peste* 1507, 1.

keep “the houses and streets very clean.”²⁵⁸ “Trash from the streets ought to be thrown outside of the city” so that sources of harmful smells could be eradicated.²⁵⁹ Residents should also avoid “walking through the streets, especially through the dirtier parts where there are bad odors.”²⁶⁰ Alvarez – the Protomedico²⁶¹ and personal doctor of Queen Isabella I of Castile – elaborated his philosophies on the causes and treatments of plague to a broad Castilian-speaking audience. Since his work was written in vernacular rather than Latin, its purpose was to disseminate medical knowledge to a general, literate audience who could then apply his theories in real world scenarios.²⁶² Thus, it is no surprise that Alvarez’s medical discourses echo throughout the municipal ordinances of

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 2

²⁶¹ The Protomedico was the leading expert on medical matters. In the early sixteenth century, the office itself was not well-organized. A more concrete and standardized training of doctors emerged in the late sixteenth century with the reforms of Philip II. For a more in-depth examination of these reforms, see Michele Clouse, *Medicine, Government, and Health in Philip II’s Spain: Shared Interests, Competing Authorities* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

²⁶² Text reception and theories concerning reception are rather difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the fact that the city council issued measures that were in accordance with what the medical manuals indicates that knowledge on how to combat plague was to a greater or lesser extent known amongst the general public. Michael Solomon argues that the medical manuals in the vernacular were specifically written for a general educated audience who could access methods of treatments in his book *Fictions of well-being; sickly readers and medical writing in late medieval and early modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

Avila. Having no other reliable theory at their disposal, *abulenses* continued to adhere to the best medical knowledge at the time when dealing with polluted airs.

A series of sanitary ordinances were reaffirmed in early 1519 with a small addition: those who failed to maintain hygienic conditions on the streets and in living quarters could be punished with a fine. In 1485 Avila expounded a series of statutes designed to maintain cleanliness and healthy living environments. When the council reasserted the importance of these older statutes in February of 1519, they attached a small fee for those who did not abide by the rules. Residents were expected to keep the area and streets near their homes orderly and clean “for the health of the people,” and failure to do so would result in a one *maravedí* fine.²⁶³ Likewise, the neighbors who lived in the vicinity of the Adaja²⁶⁴ were ordered to “remove the pigsty that is at the gate of Adaja” within eight days or suffer the penalty of paying 200 *maravedís* each year.²⁶⁵ A cynical analysis of this narrative would contend that this was a money-making scheme to refill the coffers which were nearly empty after the *guarda de peste*. Such a critical reading, however, still does not deny the fact that even though Avila had been declared “healthy,” it still issued a series of decrees to prevent and curb the proliferation of harmful airs.

²⁶³ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 2, 182.

²⁶⁴ The Adaja is small river which passes the west side of Avila. It originates from the Sierra of Avila and feeds into the Duero.

²⁶⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 2, 182.

Multiple ordinances concerning the filth of the city were reaffirmed to prevent any noxious fumes from spawning. On February 12, 1519, the council ordered the servants to “make a cover to throw mud and trash and other dirty things from the city so that it can all be tossed outside the city,” for the purpose of separating the polluted from the unpolluted.²⁶⁶ Clean and unclean zones had to be clearly demarcated.²⁶⁷ On March 12, 1519, two months after the guards and checkpoints were disbanded, it was preached at the plazas and public meeting places that “no one must throw out dirty nor clean water through windows.”²⁶⁸ Residents complained that “the streets are very dirty and have a bad odor of fish and other things,” and as a remedy to the growing stench, “[the council] commanded that [residents] may not dump water into things that don’t have a drain.”²⁶⁹

Up to this point, Avila made concerted efforts to prevent the spawning of miasma through ordinances of cleanliness; however, since the epidemic had not caused any known casualties, the records from the consistory, cathedral chapter, and hospitals abruptly cease to mention any more plague-related ordinances, suggesting that fear and worry of an epidemic evaporated. For approximately four months, voices concerning the epidemic were completely silent in the records. Soon enough though, an actual epidemic

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ See Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. (London: Routledge, 1966)

²⁶⁸ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 2,189

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

crept into the province, afflicting neighboring towns and villages of Avila. A new set of critical measures to fight against the epidemic were set into place July, when communities just outside of Avila began to report that the plague was claiming its first victims in the province.

In the summer of 1519, the *regidores* and *corregidores* met on seven separate occasions to discuss the latest outbreak of bubonic plague, which had been wreaking havoc throughout Castile and had made its way into the province. One of the alderman of the council, Pedro Del Peso, made a gut wrenching announcement to his fellow council members on July 5, 1519: “the plague is bringing the highest degree of suffering to the neighboring village of Cardeñosa.”²⁷⁰ Upon hearing the news, they ordered the town criers to preach in all of the major streets and markets of Avila that “by the pain of one hundred lashes, no one from Cardeñosa shall enter.”²⁷¹ One week later, on the July 12 the council held another meeting, proclaiming, “Those from Mingorría because they are dying from pestilence, under the pain of one hundred lashes and anyone who lets them enter neither the ones from Martin Muñoz neither may enter here under the same said penalty.”²⁷² For the next several months, sentinels at all nine major gates kept vigilant as residents braced themselves for the epidemic which crept ever closer to the city. It is not certain how many men and women were actually punished by

²⁷⁰ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 2.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

flagellation,²⁷³ but the aggressive response by the council reveals a level of panic and distress that was not palpable before the outbreak entered the province.

In early July the earlier sanitary ordinances, specifically dealing with preventing the potential causes of noxious fumes, were re-emphasized. In accordance with the 1485 Statutes as a guide for municipal sanitation standards, the council assumed the smell emanating from the polluted waters were a plausible source of miasma. To combat this, town criers went to all of the major plazas, markets, and streets to proclaim that “the houses and streets must be cleaned, and no one should dump water outside nor other things through their windows, and no one should pour water into the sewers if there are any leaks in the system.”²⁷⁴ Determining to what degree the residents actually followed these procedures is problematic. Given that these orders were issued repetitively, we may deduce that some residents were ignoring or not adhering to the ordinances. Aside from the effectiveness of broadcasting a message, the municipal mandates reflect that the council of Avila observed the general practices on how to prevent the proliferation of miasma.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ For an indepth analysis of the Punishment in early modern Castile, see Richard Kagan, *Pleitos y Pleiteantes*. (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1991); Enrique Vallalba Pérez, *La Administración de la Justicia Penal en castilla y en La corte a conmienzos del Siglo XVII* (Madrid: Actas, 1993).

²⁷⁴ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 4, fol. 13

²⁷⁵ Other medical manuals in the mid sixteenth century often refer to stale wheat or barley as the cause of miasma. Although the substance which spawns miasma is different (i.e. stale water and sewage vs spoiled grain), it does show that miasmatic theory was prevalent in early sixteenth century Avila.

Coupled with these traditional preventive measures, a rather peculiar order commanded groups of men to light bonfires using fragrant herbs to detoxify the tainted air.²⁷⁶ On the July 5, 1519, the council summoned groups of men to bring “200 loads of rosemary and juniper” to be thrown into the controlled fires.²⁷⁷ The funds needed to purchase these herbs came from the council’s purse, and those who did their bidding “will be paid conforming to what is usually paid.”²⁷⁸ One week after their request, the rosemary and juniper arrived, and following the recommendations of Spain’s leading medical experts, the *regidores* arranged that “the rosemary that was brought to this city should be divided accordingly: to each parish church, one load; to each *regidor*, one load; to each group of men, of six different groups, four loads so that all may be shared in order to make bonfires.”²⁷⁹ Out of all of the social groups, those on top – namely, the *corregidor*, *regidores*, and members of the church – received baskets of herbs to be burned. As for the remaining bunches of herbs, it was recommended that

²⁷⁶ A similar practice of making bonfires happened a century and half later in London. A key difference is that Avila only burned things which produced aromatic scents, whereas in London, anything that could be burned was thrown into the fires. During the Great Plague of London (1665-1666), James Leasor explained that “anything combustible – tar barrels, old furniture, faggots, were fed into the flames as the sparks soared upwards towards the stars.” Such items would not have been permitted to be burned in Avila. *The Plague and The Fire* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 153.

²⁷⁷ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 4, fol. 13

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 14

with the rest of the herbs they are to be made into bonfires in *Mercado Chico* and in *Mercado Grande* and at the principal gates of the city; and to each notary of the council, each one load of herbs; and to the servants, each shall receive one load of herbs; to Gild Xuarez, one load of herbs; to each monastery, one load.²⁸⁰

One week later, on the 16 of July they commanded that 100 bundles of Spanish Broom, a fragrant plant native to Iberia, be brought “in order to make bonfires for the health of the city and that it is to be divided by groups of men and they will be paid.”²⁸¹ Such municipal ordinances were not unique to Avila, and were actually part of a long history of ancient theories on the etiologies of disease.

Hippocratic medical knowledge postulated that aromatic smoke and the use of pleasant smelling herbs could purify the air of the foul odors emanating from sewage, dead bodies, and rotten food.²⁸² In the sixteenth century Spanish medical theorists and experts viewed rosemary and its pleasant scent as an herb with medicinal properties that could alleviate the common cold, cure paralysis, and other maladies. Agustín Farfán, a physician who immigrated to the New World, praised the “good smell” of rosemary in his *tratado breve de medicina y de todas las enfermedades* and suggested that it can be “incensed near those who are sick two to three times a day, with a good smelling smoke. It is for this sickness that the rosemary is marvelous.”²⁸³ Incensing seemed to have been

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine*.

²⁸³ Agustín Farfán, *Tratado Breve Medicina y de todas las enfermedades* (1610), 101.

the preferred method of extracting the beneficial properties of rosemary into the atmosphere. Those who had a fever from malaria, however, should “warm the feet, knees and hands with a warm cloth that has been incensed with rosemary.”²⁸⁴ Cooks, medical professionals, and public health officials used rosemary for its salubrious, purifying, and curative properties.

Fernando Alvarez’s *Regimiento Contra la Peste* details specific instructions on how to make aromatic bonfires, directions which were, to a greater or lesser extent, followed by the *abulenses*. Common herbs “in the homes” such as “rosemary, thyme, bay leaf, and aloes” can be used to make “smoke from them,” Alvarez advised. Due to their fragrant properties, these “good scents are what you want to heat up.”²⁸⁵ However, burning herbs and plants would not suffice on their own since they could not generate sustained, intense heat. These herbs, according to Alvarez, were “especially good” to place with “firewood” so that they could burn longer and extract the fullness of the pleasant smelling smoke.²⁸⁶ He recommended against burning “rags and leather” in these bonfires since they left a “bad odor,” which could be harmful to the health of those in the vicinity.²⁸⁷ Avila followed these recommendations closely in order to fumigate the areas with heavy traffic and remove the stench, hoping to purge all sources of the plague-inducing air.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 204

²⁸⁵ Alvarez, *Regimiento contra la Peste*, 3.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

As the epidemic grew, preventative measures such as cleaning the streets and setting aromatic bonfires were not enough to keep members of the cathedral chapter and nobility from exercising their medieval rights to escape the catastrophe. Cognizant that the epidemic would not be quelled anytime soon, the members of the cathedral chapter, the nobility, and official representatives of the Crown did what was all too common among the upper classes: they quickly made arrangements to flee the city. Prior to leaving Avila, the nobility notified the cathedral chapter that they would no longer be making their ordinary charitable donations to the ongoing construction projects, owing to the ongoing epidemic. On July 1, 1519, the cathedral chapter reaffirmed the rights of the nobility to temporarily relocate to a safer region: “on this day the lords confirm the statutes for those who are absent because of the pestilence. Furthermore, it has been arranged that they are not able to regularly donate alms, and they are able to take their children with them.”²⁸⁸ Three days later, the council, in congruence with the cathedral chapter, permitted the nobles to flee to a safer zone, so long as men in exodus adhered to the municipal statutes regarding the pestilence: “All those who wanted to leave where they wanted will conform to the statute...of the pestilence”²⁸⁹ Relocating to a safe haven

²⁸⁸ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 2, 90. “este dia los dichos senores confirmaron el statuto de los que absentan por la pestilencia e que manden que no puedan dar limosna mas de la orinaria e que pueden tomar las criaturas que les paresciere.”

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 91 “todos los que quisieren se vayan donde quisieren conforme al estatuto... (de la pestilencia), lo qual difirieron para que se concierten todos el miercoles que verna; que lo vean todos como sea mas provechoso e honra de todos.”

was an option that many of the leaders selected, and by doing so, they were active participants of an older tradition and right.

Months earlier the church and local government had been quibbling over the possession of a key to the bishop's wicket gate, but as soon as the epidemic actually entered Avila, the Church and council put aside their differences and worked together through legal means to justify their need to escape the disaster. The cathedral statutes, which were ratified in 1513, enabled the upper echelons of society – both religious and non-religious – to flee major destruction. The purpose of the statutes was to dictate the canonical rights of the chapter, “aspects of parish life, and even of the convent and monasteries of the city.”²⁹⁰ Approved officially on November 11, 1513, by the bishop of Avila, Alonso Carrillo de Albornoz, these statutes remained in use until 1760.²⁹¹ These statutes would later be confirmed by Pope Leo X in 1519, giving them official recognition and authorization from Rome. The *Libro de los Estatutos de la Iglesia Catedral de Avila* authorizes that “each time and when there may be a pestilence in this city of Avila [...] the Lords, Dean, and Chapter, for fear of the pestilence, should be absent from this city [...] one may be able to be absent when he may want at his own

²⁹⁰ *Libro de Estatutos de la Iglesia Catedral de Ávila de 1513*, ed. Carmela Luis López, (Ávila: Gran Duque de Alba, 2005), 11.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

pleasure.”²⁹² For those who opted to remain in the city, they should “serve in the church” and were to receive their daily rations.²⁹³

Even though they were granted permission to escape the epidemic, the clerical lords were still required to fulfill their duties from a pre-determined safe zone. On July 13, 1519, the cathedral chapter made an announcement about the responsibilities of the clergy who had left Avila:

They ordered and commanded that if one must be absent because of the pestilence, the Lord Dean will be able to call upon six people who are the nearest where the Lord Dean might be in order to agree upon important business. They are obligated to go where they are designated. The Lord Dean has named the place of Hortigosa, land of Segovia.²⁹⁴

Ortigosa, a small village outside of Segovia, operated as a refuge and a meeting place to conduct official business. The cathedral statutes of 1513 and the records of 1519 emphasize that the chapter members were fully entitled to leave the city, provided that they attended important meetings in a pre-arranged safe haven outside of Avila.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid., 101-102

²⁹⁴ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 2, “ordenaron e mandaron que si se aya de absentar por la pestilencia que el senior dean pueda llamar a seis personas las mas cercanas que estuvieren donde el dicho senior dean estuviere para acordar los negocios de ynportancia y que aquellos sean obligados a ir donde nonbraren y el dicho senior dean nonbro el lugar de hortigosa tierra de segovia.”

On July 16, 1519, the council ordered the alderman of the village of Ríofrío, located in the far northwest corner of the province of Avila, to make special accommodations for important people from Avila. Eleven days after the plague entered Avila, the council warned the Mayor of Ríofrío “not to welcome any person for lodging because those spaces must be reserved for the *regidores* and justices of Avila in case the health of this city does not improve.”²⁹⁵ In a similar manner, several members of the cathedral chapter, which consisted of over 100 men during this time, also packed their bags and abandoned the city.²⁹⁶

If the nobles fled, why did the lower classes also not escape the disaster as well? Although this is an important question, the voices of the lower ranks of society are absent in the records, and the notaries make no mention of what commoners did in 1519. An important section from Sandoval’s narrative provides some important clues to their available options; however, significantly, Sandoval noted that Valladolid became “depopulated” as the people began to flee.²⁹⁷ Therefore, we know that escape was an option also available to those of lower rank, especially since no municipal ordinances outlawed their departure. Although *abulenses* of lower rank could have fled in a similar manner, the evidence does not suggest that they selected that route. One reason might be that they did not have a pre-arranged safe zone reserved for them, which could have

²⁹⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 2, 91.

²⁹⁶ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 2.

²⁹⁷ Sandoval, *Historia de la Vida*, 85.

persuaded them not to depart. Secondly, since the summer of 1518, they had heard and witnessed foreigners from plague-ridden lands being turned away, which could have deterred them from seeking refuge elsewhere themselves. We do know that many of those in the lower ranks did in fact stay in Avila, and among those who remained, many embraced the powerful symbols and rituals of their faith in the hopes of being liberated from the seemingly unending catastrophe. The performance of these rituals encompassed autochthonous traditions that were peculiar to Avila and harkened back to a romanticized Christian history.

Holy Objects that Heal: Desecrated Hosts and Ancient Relics of San Segundo

Despite the exodus of the upper class, many professionals and religious men and women remained in Avila to fulfill their vocation and tend to the needs of the sick. As gatekeepers, doctors, and street cleaners worked hard to suppress the contagion and heal the infirm, the clergy and confraternities of Avila attended to the spiritual needs of the people. During this calamitous moment, the Dominican Friars of Avila utilized one of the most holy treasures of the city, a Eucharist referred to as the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia*. At the command of the Catholic Monarchs in 1489, this Eucharist had been sealed in a box and entrusted to the Dominicans of Avila, who safeguarded it for nearly thirty years in the Royal Monastery of Saint Thomas – a place that the Inquisitor General Thomas de Torquemada frequented.

The Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia*, in the words of Antonio Cianca, remained untouched for 30 years, “until the year 1519 of Christ, which in this year was a general and great pestilence in all of Spain.”²⁹⁸ The Dominicans pulled out the Eucharist from the sealed box, which had been tucked away in a chapel within the convent, with the hope of bringing the body of Christ to alleviate the suffering of the people and to quell the wrath of God. The friars took out the Eucharist, placed it in a monstrance, and carried it along in a procession while singing *iuvat deus civitatem* (may God aid the city). The processional route started outside the walls, and continued along into the main plazas within the walls, as the friars carried the Host from parish to parish and convent to convent. As a repetitive cultural performance, the Corpus Christi procession evoked a recognizable religious devotion for those who were seeking liberation from their fear and suffering.

Cianca, the sixteenth century notary and historian of Avila, recounted the details of this emotionally-charged charismatic event. The residents congregated around the processional routes as the faithful began to cry and wail at the sight of the host, and the sound of this religious fervency “echoed through the streets.”²⁹⁹ The faithful solemnly repeated this perambulatory procession for eight days, from morning to afternoon.³⁰⁰ The people, who had been suffering both physically and emotionally from the pestilence, had

²⁹⁸ Cianca, *Historia de San Segundo*, 159

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 159-160.

turned to the object, which was emblematic of the miraculous. In the aftermath, notaries recorded that many people throughout Avila had been healed of their infirmities, and that the plague gradually began to fade after this procession.³⁰¹

In Roman Catholic theology, the Eucharist, which still has the accidents of bread and wine, is the literal substantive body and blood of Christ, indicating that it is a center of devotion and worthy of worship among the faithful. In the late medieval period, multiple stories recounted the miraculous powers of the Eucharist: turning into actual the flesh and blood of Jesus, healing the sick, and being indestructible.³⁰² The sacrament and the cultural implications had an overarching religious, institutional, and cultural influence throughout late medieval and early modern Europe, and its significance is especially evident during catastrophes. The celebration of the Eucharist, since it was connected to Christian soteriology, was one of the most – if not the most – dominant religious rituals in Europe. In her exceptional monograph *Corpus Christi*, medievalist Miri Rubin states that “the sacrament was a central symbol or test of orthodoxy and dissent throughout the later middle ages.”³⁰³ Religious art, ceremonies, prayers, miracles, and theological discourse all concentrated on the Eucharist from various angles of interpretation. The

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 28.

³⁰³ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 9.

multiple discourses on the Eucharist had a penetrating influence, and permeated across political, social, and cultural boundaries throughout Europe, a cult surrounding the extraordinary abilities of the Eucharist emerged, making it an integral component of late medieval religious discourses and spirituality.³⁰⁴

Thus, when the residents of Avila pulled out this Host, which had been stored away in the Royal Monastery of Saint Thomas, they were actively participating in and eliciting an ancient tradition that embraced the physical manifestations of religious piety, despite the growing popularity of some mystical forms of devotions that were practiced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³⁰⁵

The spiritual culture of Avila in particular underscored the curative powers of the Eucharist as a center for devotion for the sick. In the first statute of the cathedral chapter of 1513, the clergy commanded that “from here forward the most holy sacrament of the Corpus Christi is in the high altar in two or three forms for the sick.” The holy space for the sacrament was provided so that the infirm could be healed. It should be emphasized that the statutes did not specifically address the poor, orphaned, or those with other special needs. It was not that these other groups were shunned; rather, it was that the

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ The first monograph to critically analyze Corpus Christi processions in Spain was Francis-George Very, *The Spanish Corpus Christi Procession: A literary and folkloric study* (Valencia: Tipografia Moderna, 1962); Teofilo F. Ruiz, *A King Travels: Festive Traditions in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) dedicated a seminal chapter on Corpus Christi processions and carnivals in Spain.

cathedral had a special emphasis “*para los enfermos*.”³⁰⁶ The healing power of the sacrament and its ability to treat the sick embraced a devotional practice handed down through centuries in Avila.³⁰⁷ It is not surprising then that the *abulenses* sought after the object which was integral to the well-being of both their body and soul during the epidemic.

Upon first glance, it might appear that this Corpus Christi procession was just like any other late medieval and early modern one; however, a closer inspection and analysis of the history behind the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* reveals multiple layers of religious and social significance and a strong anti-Jewish dimension. Numerous sixteenth and seventeenth century histories recount that a group of Jews had illegally purchased this specific host in 1489, in a small town called *la Guardia*, located just outside of the capital, Toledo. A *converso*³⁰⁸ named Benito García, who had just completed a pilgrimage, had stopped at a local inn to spend the evening, chat with the villagers and enjoy a few rounds of drinks with a small party. In the middle of the festivity, Garcia accidentally dropped his knapsack, and a communion wafer fell out. The men at the bar quickly summoned the bishop’s vicar, who submitted Garcia to the rack and ordered him

³⁰⁶ *Libro de Estatutos de la Iglesia Catedral*, 56.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Conversos* were Jews who converted to Catholicism, usually because of societal and cultural pressure. Their conversion was a source of suspicion for Spanish society, which sought to root out, through the Spanish Inquisition, those who secretly practiced Judaism. See Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*; Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition* for an overview on *conversos* and the Inquisition.

to be tortured for several days, despite García's persistent pleas of innocence. Under the pain of torture, Garcia confessed that he and a group of his Jewish accomplices had kidnapped, whipped, and crucified a young Christian boy from *la Guardia* in a dark subterranean dwelling in order to use the blood from his heart and the consecrated host to produce a magical concoction to kill all Christians and rule the world.³⁰⁹

Later versions of this story recount that García and his accomplices, who were also *conversos*, punished the child in a manner similar to the sufferings that Jesus endured before and during his crucifixion. The story recounts that the *conversos* wanted to give the innocent Christian boy "the same number of lashes that their grandparents gave to the lord."³¹⁰ Yet, these men "erred in counting, giving the child five more" lashes. The suspected men "crowned, crucified, and beat the child numerous times" mimicking the passion of Jesus.³¹¹ Like many other instances of alleged ritualistic murder, García and his accomplices supposedly committed this grave act in a "cave,

³⁰⁹ Numerous histories recount this story. See John Longhurst, *The Age of Torquemada* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1964); Suárez Fernández, *La expulsion de los judíos*.

³¹⁰ Rodrigo Yepes, *Historia de la muerte y glorioso martirio del Sancto Innocente* (1583), 53

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53-66

cavern, and subterranean place.”³¹² The key ingredient to this *hechizo*³¹³ was a “host” and the “heart of a little Christian boy.”³¹⁴

These types of stories of ritual murder involving Jews and desecration of Hosts were common in other parts of Europe as well, as demonstrated by historians such as Ronnie Po-chia Hsia. The charge of deicide against the Jews – i.e. the accusation that Jews were responsible for killing Christ – was prevalent in medieval Christendom, meaning that some Christians continued to view Jews as a true threat against Jesus in the Eucharist. Hsia convincingly demonstrates that in the German lands numerous charges of Jews participating in ritualistic host desecrations reproduced symbols of Christian power and authority over a minority group.³¹⁵ In these exaggerated stories, Jews stabbed hosts with knives and nails as blood miraculously poured out from the wounded host.³¹⁶ The accusation of deicide and perpetual Christ-killing was an allegation that Jews were unable to shed, a charge that even conversion was not able to remove.

Medieval Castile had a long history of anti-Jewish legislation, which attached a social stigmas of collective guilt upon the Jews. *Las Siete Partidas* – a corpus of laws established under Alfonso X (1221-1284) in medieval Castile – established regulations

³¹² Ibid., 71

³¹³ Spell; charm.

³¹⁴ Ibid. 71.

³¹⁵ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 3.

³¹⁶ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 76.

limiting the level of participation Jews could have in Castilian society. The legal corpus explained that Jews were unable to obtain high positions in society because of their communal guilt for having tortured and killed Jesus:

Jews were formerly highly honored, and enjoyed privileges above all other races, for they alone were called the People of God. But for the reason that they disowned Him who had honored them and given them privileges; and instead of showing Him [Jesus] reverence humiliated Him, by shamefully putting Him to death on the cross [...] The emperors, who in former times were lords of all the world, considered it fitting and right that, on account of the treason which they committed in killing their lord, they should lose all said honors and privileges, so that no Jew could ever afterwards hold an honorable position, or a public office by means of which he might, in any way, oppress a Christian.³¹⁷

It is precisely because they “put him to death” that they, and their offspring, could no longer hold “an honorable position” in Castilian society. Nothing – not even conversion – could shed this collective guilt.³¹⁸

In late medieval Spain, according to *Las Siete Partidas*, Jews were also accused of committing heinous, atrocious, and murderous transgressions against innocent Christians. The language embedded within the legal code contains key semantic markers which attach specific crimes to the charge of deicide:

we have heard it said that in some places Jews celebrated, and still celebrate Good Friday, which commemorates the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which

³¹⁷ Seventh section, 24th title, Law III of *Las Siete Partidas: Volume 1: The Medieval Church The World of Clerics and Laymen* trans. by Robert Burns (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 1434.

³¹⁸ Jerome Friedman “Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 3-30.

Christians acknowledge, by way of contempt; stealing children and fastening them to crosses, and making images of wax and crucifying them, when they cannot obtain children. [...therefore] We also forbid any Jew to dare to leave his house or his quarter on Good Friday, but they must all remain shut up until Saturday morning;³¹⁹

These same tropes found in *Las Siete Partidas* resurfaced in the story of *Santo Niño de la Guardia*: ethnic Jews kidnapped children to fasten them to crosses, crucified wax images, and defiled the most holy days of the Christian calendar. The alleged crimes of the *conversos* in *la Guardia* emblemize the complex intersection between popular historical memory, fabrication of myths, and the persecution of religious minorities.

The case of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* reached popularity all throughout the Iberian Peninsula, and a cult revolving around the crucified boy gathered widespread momentum. The Holy Child of *la Guardia*, as he was commonly known, became a national monument, and was elevated to the status of martyr and saint.³²⁰ As for the accused Jews, they were arrested, put on trial, and executed directly outside of the walls in Avila in Mercado Grande. The Inquisitor General, Thomas de Torquemada, who had close ties to the Crown, followed the Inquisitorial proceeding against the accused men with much fervor. In the early 1490s, Torquemada, according to John Longhurst, made a case to the Catholic Monarchs to expel the Jews in 1492, citing the *Santo Niño de la Guardia* case as a key example of Jewish subterfuge and malevolence.³²¹ The Catholic

³¹⁹ *Las Siete Partidas*, 1433-1434.

³²⁰ John Longhurst, *The Age of Torquemada*.

³²¹ John Longhurst, *The Age of Torquemada*, 126-128.

Monarchs sided with Torquemada, even referencing the *la Guardia* case in the Edict of Expulsion of 1492 as an example of Jewish “blasphemy and murder.”³²²

Even though the Corpus Christi procession in 1519 used ordinary signs as symbols, therefore, it was a truly extraordinary ritual because of the multi-layered significance found in the history of the perambulated Eucharist. By elevating and displaying the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia* during the Corpus Christi procession, the *abulenses* were embracing a powerful symbol of the indestructibility of the Eucharist and rekindling the memories of a pre-expulsion, anti-Jewish history. The drive to fight plague then carried multi-layered meanings: the drive to purify the Kingdom of unsanctioned *converso* rituals, the holiness of the Child from *la Guardia*, and the host itself, which was claimed to have been undamaged during the ritual murder.

After the eight-day Corpus Christi procession, a second historically significant object seized the hearts and minds of the *abulenses* who had been enduring the untimely passing of their loved ones. Antonio Cianco recounted that a group of construction workers made an important discovery, which they believed were the relics of San Segundo. Construction first began near the church of San Sebastian on January 30, 1518, when the cathedral chapter ordered “it is obligated to give and pay fifty *ducados* for the construction of the church [...] The Lord Bishop conceded [this payment] to the Parish of

³²² Ibid.

San Sebastian and San Segundo of this said city.”³²³ As the construction workers were making renovations to the walls of the parish of Saint Sebastian, they noticed a “sweet scent” and saw human bones, ashes, dust, a skull, miter, chalice, ring, and a patina behind an old wall.³²⁴ After a thorough investigation of the ancient remains, the bishop and local clergy determined that these were the true relics of San Segundo – the first bishop of Avila. After this discovery and throughout the sixteenth century, notarial records detail how people who contracted plague, the blind, the deaf, the mute, and the paralytic made journeys to touch the holy body of San Segundo. According to their own testimonies, all infirmities and disabilities were healed through the marvelous intercession of San Segundo.

The history itself, and most of the testimonials recorded around this event were recounted by Cianca. On February 27, 1571, Philip II gave official authorization to Cianca to commence his profession as a notary in Avila. For nearly two decades, Cianca penned over 10,000 folios about a wide array of topics from finances, letters, payments, inventories, testimonials, to information about miracles during his tenure in Avila, making him one of the foremost authorities on administrative and historical knowledge and procedures of sixteenth century Avila.³²⁵ All historical works pertaining to sixteenth

³²³ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 2, 10. “se obligo de dar e pagar a la fabrica de la dicha yglesia cinquenta ducados por razon de quarto, que pertenesce a la dicha yglesia de la demanda e inpetra, que concedio el senor Obispo a la hermita de sant Sebastian e sant Segundo desta dicha ciudad, los quales se obligo de dar y pagar para lo qual obligo su persona e bienes e dio poder a las justicias.”

³²⁴ Ferrer García, *La invención de la iglesia de San Segundo*, 169.

³²⁵ Jesús Arribas, *Historia, Literatura, Y Fiesta*, 42-43.

century Avila and Saint Theresa of Avila frequently utilize Cianca's texts as the source of knowledge, which can be both problematic and illuminating for modern historians, since he was entrenched in both the popular and official religious life of Avila. The administrative language and style of Cianca's writings give a sense of objectivity, providing key details on the cult of San Segundo and the discovery of the relics with minimal ambiguity; however, one must approach his documents and history with more careful scrutiny, given his position in Avila's society, which was closely tied with both high level ecclesiastical powers and popular religiosity. He knew prominent ecclesiastical figures, including Bishop Lara and Theresa of Avila, and he acted as the patron and administrator of the Confraternity of San Segundo. As a result, Cianca should not be viewed as a cold hard administrator; rather, his writings should be approached as a unique window to both official church positions and, more importantly, a direct insight to the perceptions and practices of the Confraternity of San Segundo.

For the *abulenses* then and now, San Segundo is a source of civic pride since he functions as a direct link to Avila's apostolic roots. As described in Chapter 1, San Segundo was said to be one of the original seven disciples of the apostle Saint James, who was commissioned to evangelize the Iberian Peninsula in the first century. Thus, the discovery of these relics brought Avila closer to its pre-Islamic roots. A new cult devoted to San Segundo quickly emerged in 1519 as the residents of Avila penned poems, crafted prayers, and composed music to honor their first bishop. Even today, many streets, buildings, and businesses are named after the apostolic bishop.

Jesús Arribas, one of the few historians to have written a critical history of San Segundo, persuasively argues that the cult of San Segundo did not exist before the outbreak, even though most sixteenth century *abulenses* did recognize him as the first bishop. The 1513 cathedral statutes did reference San Segundo numerous times, however. For example, organizing and preparing for religious processions from San Segundo church to Santa Lucia cost 100 *maravedís*.³²⁶ Also, an altar devoted to San Segundo attracted numerous visitor from within the city.³²⁷ This evidence shows that devotion around the apostolic saint existed before this plague, and that San Segundo undoubtedly functioned as part of Avila's spiritual life. It is then perhaps more accurate to argue that the cult of San Segundo existed before 1518, but only gained more notoriety and entered into the mainstream spiritual life of Avila after the discovery of his relics.

The prevalence and the rapid emergence of a new – or at least expanded – cult of San Segundo meant that other rural saintly devotions were repositioned to a less popular status. Santa Paula Barbada de Cardeñosa, who was a local saint perhaps tied to older legendary fertility cults, for example, was linked to a more rural unsanctioned cult that interfered with dogmas and official ceremonies.³²⁸ Santa Paula Barbada and the cult of San Sebastian, both of which were popular before the plague of 1519, gradually diminished in importance in Avila as new attention and love focused on San Segundo.

³²⁶ *Libro de Estatutos de la Iglesia Catedral*, 39.

³²⁷ *Libro de Estatutos de la Iglesia Catedral*, 63.

³²⁸ Ferrer García, *La invención de la iglesia de San Segundo*, 25.

William Christian in his magisterial work *Local religion in sixteenth century Spain* argued that christocentric and Marian forms of devotion, which became popularized after the Council of Trent, contributed to the steady disappearance of local specialized saints such as Santa Paula Barbada and San Sebastian. The case in Avila, however, demonstrates that the faithful recalibrated their fixation not directly on Jesus and Mary, but on an apostolic saint nearly fifty years before the reforms of the Council of Trent gained momentum.³²⁹

It is critical to note that the discovery of the relics Spanish bishops during episodes of pestilence was nothing out of the ordinary in the sixteenth century. Cuenca for example, “discovered” the remains of San Julian, their second bishop, as an outbreak was sweeping through Castile.³³⁰ The use of these local holy relics to prevent the coming of pestilence was also common occurrence. Later in 1588, for example, the city council of Zamora unveiled the relics of San Ildefonso, hoping to prevent plague that had been ravaging neighboring villages from entering.³³¹ The discovery of saintly remains and the invention of histories around Spanish saintly relics is a topic that has remained unexplored; however, historians have not established any links between on how saintly

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Sara Nalle, *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

³³¹ Maureen Flynn, *Sacred Charity: Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain, 1400-1700* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 32.

remains are coincidentally found during epidemics, a topic which warrants further investigation.

Conclusion

The 1519 plague outbreak acted as a distinctive moment when medieval traditions and practices rekindled autochthonous religious histories and memories of Avila. The Corpus Christi processions with the Host of *Santo Niño de la Guardia*, through its rich, multi-layered signs and symbols, revived memories of ritualistic murder. Concurrently, the discovery of the relics of San Segundo connected Avila to its ancient, apostolic roots. Caroline Bynum's seminal monograph *Wonderful Blood* argued that certain anxieties led late Medieval Europeans to actively search for connections to God. As a result, an obsession with and a constant search for "holy matter" consumed the medieval mind. Holy matter, according to Bynum, acted as a point of intersection between God and the inhabitable world. Relics, bleeding communion wafers, etc. validated God's presence for Catholics. The evidence in this chapter demonstrates that the outbreak of plague helped to cement older conceptions about holy matter.³³² The outbreak operated as a trigger in which the memories of these holy objects reconnected Avila to an idealized – perhaps legendary – Christian past.

³³² Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 7.

This chapter has explored and disentangled the meanings behind two complementary sixteenth century methods of attenuating the plague outbreak of 1519. The first was a more secular approach based on miasmatic theories of disease: isolating the city and eliminating sources of miasma. The council tried to prevent contagious bodies from entering, ordered sewage to be cleaned, and burned aromatic herbs to purify air. The second was spiritual, relying upon local holy objects to invoke God's assistance and mercy. These two paths did not conflict or clash in any noticeable way; rather, both were acceptable and legitimate methods of disaster relief. This is not to suggest, however, that all available explanations were used. Astrological explanations, which were common in early modern medical systems of thought, played no meaningful role in shaping the understanding of the causes of plague at the local level. Thus, some, but not all, means were used to interpret the causes of the outbreak.

By the mid-sixteenth century, such methods of eradicating the sources of contagion and explaining the causes of outbreaks evolved, largely because of external influences. Chapter 3 and 4 explore how and in what ways evolving medical theories in the Mediterranean and changes to Philip II's medical licensing program influenced plague-related ordinances in Avila; however, this was not a wholesale adoption. Chapter 3, in particular, analyzes how local political concerns and abnormal weather patterns also shaped such responses to outbreaks.

CHAPTER 3

Fluid Discourses: Communication and Transmutation of Messages of Plague

Most histories of Avila in the 1580s recount the death, burial, and the contentious reacquisition of the body of Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, the Counter-Reformation mystic and saint who established the order of the Discalced Carmelites. After St. Teresa died in Alba de Tormes, which is about 100km from Avila, her death prompted the religious leaders of her order to sway the municipal leaders of Alba de Tormes to bring her body back to her spiritual hometown.³³³ In the days and months following her death, men and women, both religious and secular, provided testimony of miraculous healing and divine intercession – accounts which bear resemblance to those about San Segundo's exhumation, which occurred in the 1519. These accounts gave more credence to what many, especially her disciples, had already believed: God had favored Teresa, who had now entered into the Communion of Saints. The clergy and sisters of the Carmelites shared their memories and experiences of the deeds of St. Teresa in order to persuade the authorities of Alba de Tormes to release the holy relics to Avila, which was the epicenter of her movement for spiritual revival. In light of these events

³³³ To add to this statement, St. Teresa remained, for the most part, venerated on a smaller scale in the late sixteenth century, mainly by those within the ranks of the Discalced Carmelites. Cultic devotions around St. Teresa developed and became legitimized in the early seventeenth century with her beatification and canonization. Being elevated to the status of "co-patron" in 1627, alongside Santiago, further endorsed the claims of her most loyal advocates. For a more in-depth explanation of the seventeenth century disputations regarding her status as "co-patron," see Erin Kathleen Rowe's article "The Spanish Minerva: Imagining Teresa of Avila as Patron Saint in Seventeenth-Century Spain." *The Catholic Historical Review* 92 (2006): 574-596.

and biographical details, the majority of the scholarship concerning the Avila of the 1580s focuses on St. Teresa, whose mysticism, writings, and femininity were undoubtedly influential for reformation era Spain and Europe.³³⁴ Catholics today still have a profound respect for and venerate the counter-reformation saint; such devotions have also contributed to a fascination and curiosity of the psychology and identity of St. Teresa, who penned her deepest thoughts and anxieties while living and preaching in a patriarchal, religious society.³³⁵

While St. Teresa's life and the momentous events surrounding her death had important effects on the cultural character of Avila to the present, this historical memory and its ramifications have also overshadowed other crises of the 1580s and 1590s. Drought, fear of pestilence, long periods of isolationism, hiring new medical personal, and isolating the city from suspected foreigners all played a significant role in the local history of Avila, a history which has been virtually unexplored, especially when compared to the extensive literature, in multiple languages, on St. Teresa. This chapter

³³⁴ Since the scholarship on St. Teresa is so extensive, I will only mention a few key works, the most important of which is Jodi Bilinkoff's *The Avila of Saint Teresa*. Erin Kathleen Rowe's *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011) examines the complex and highly-contested decision and aftermath of elevating St Teresa to the status of co-patron. For an examination of female sanctity and St. Teresa in the context of the Counter-Reformation, see Gillian T.W. Ahlgren's *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³³⁵ Pope Francis initially had plans to visit Avila during the 500th anniversary of St. Teresa in 2015. Even today, thousands of pilgrims and tourists each year visit the city to see her monastery, cell, and relics. A portion of her relic – namely her finger – is on display near the monastery where she resided.

decenters St. Teresa and the religious and secular politics surrounding her death, burial, reacquisition, and canonization to highlight instead a different history of Avila, a story which adds to the history of the antecedents of the seventeenth century Castilian Crisis and the general decline of Imperial Spain.³³⁶

Using municipal records, cathedral records, and letters from the writings of Teresa, my analysis reevaluates and recontextualizes the 1580s through the lens of municipal responses to pestilence, drawing connections to the points of origins from the plague and to the desk of Philip II. Information that was recorded by villages, towns, and cities in and near Catalonia ultimately reached the desk of the Paper King.³³⁷ Philip II then communicated with key cities in Castile so that they might make preparations to guard against the pestilence; one such city was Avila.

³³⁶ *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* is a collection of seminal articles concerning the demographic, economic, and agricultural deterioration of Castile.

³³⁷ Many historians recognize Philip II as a monarch who strove to manage his vast empire with intricate networks of systems and control. For a brief overview on this topic, see Geoffrey Parker, "The King at Work," in *Philip II*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978). Arndt Brendecke, labels Philip II as the "Omniscient King" in "Informing the Council: Central Institutions and local knowledge in the Spanish Empire," in *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900*, ed. Wim Blockmans et al. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 236-239. Despite his aspirations to control the flow of information, it would be inaccurate to label Imperial Spain as an absolute monarchy. For the limitations of royal authority, see Ruth Mackay, *The Limits of Royal Authority: Resistance and Obedience in Seventeenth-Century Castile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Helen Nader, *Liberty in Absolutist Spain: The Habsburg Sale of Towns, 1516-1700* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

A key point is that medical theories permeated from region to region quickly and effectively in this period, carried by Philip's network of communication. When medical experts of Tarragona determined that clothing was a potential cause of the pestilence in the 1580s, this knowledge reached the desk of Philip, who, along with his advisers, broadcast messages warning cities throughout Spain of the imminent disaster. Avila received and responded to these messages from the Crown, and began to prohibit clothing from Catalonia and other suspicious goods from entering the city. In conjunction with the prohibition of dirty clothing and goods from areas suffering from pestilence, contaminated sources of water were also thought to be a potential cause of the illness. Therefore, the people of Avila, who were experiencing a severe drought in the summer of 1588, conducted measures to find new sources of water and carefully purified and cleaned troughs in densely populated areas.

Once the city council received news of the pestilence from Philip, the *regidores* sought to implement his royal directives to the best of their ability; however, disagreements among the *regidores* quickly emerged, since they could not come to an agreement on how to execute the king's orders. Most *regidores* wanted to uncompromisingly implement the King's commands while others raised concerns about the lack of financial resources to be able to carry out the directives. These debates reveal that during moments of catastrophes preexisting social and political tensions become an even greater point of contention. As emergency measures to thwart plague were put into place, old rivalries, issues, and anxieties resurfaced and took new shape during epidemics.

Two events in the 1580s demonstrate clearly how existing debates and tensions transformed during epidemics: the hiring of a doctor and the lack of water caused by the drought. As messages concerning the theories and various methods to evade catastrophe arrived to the *ayuntamiento*, the leaders of Avila reacted to these measures and their own crises at home simultaneously.

Emergency Response Network: (1560s-1590) Transmission of Two Epidemics

One of the primary functions of the *corregidor* in sixteenth century Spain was to stand as an official representative of the crown at the local level, discussing both urgent and mundane matters before local city councils, which were responsible for executing the King's commands.³³⁸ Acting as an official extension of Philip II's administrative authority, the *corregidores* of Avila formerly delivered warnings of outbreaks within the kingdom, described the theoretical causes of those illnesses, and proposed measures to deal with the contagion. In comparison to his predecessors, Philip II's government sent these messages with more frequency and added more specific directions on how to deal with outbreaks. In all instances where news of potential disaster arrived to the *ayuntamientos*, the *corregidores* demanded swift action from the city council in order to preclude any possible catastrophes and protect the lives of the residents. Their warning system, which delivered news on outbreaks, was dependent not only on a quick, efficient

³³⁸ The *cortes de toledo* of 1480 sought to "strengthen royal control over municipal administration as well as to raise the standard of urban government." J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain: 1469-1716* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 94.

communication system, but also a royally sponsored medical institution which identified and classified each contagion so that governments could respond accordingly at the local level. This section examines how and in what ways news of pestilence and medical knowledge permeated from region to region. It was during the reign of Philip II in the second half of the sixteenth century that the links within this network strengthened to become more interconnected than earlier decades.

The chief government institution responsible for overseeing matters pertaining to medical treatment, pharmacy, and general health was the *Tribunal del Protomedicato*, an institution established, officially, by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella in 1477.³³⁹ The administrative powers of the *Protomedicato* extended well beyond the peninsula, reaching deep into the American colonies and Spanish-controlled regions of Europe as well as other territorial possessions scattered across the globe. To maintain uniform standards throughout the empire, the *Protomedicato* formulated and regulated the curriculum to professionally train and certify physicians and other medical professionals, at least in theory. In reality, however, royal control and centralization over medical professionalization was not well-regulated, causing many Castilians to be wary of physicians.

³³⁹ The first documented use of the term *protomédico* come from Aragon in the thirteenth century, and it referred to the chief medical professional who was “first among the physicians.” However, the *protomedicato* only became an officially recognized institution in 1477. Michele Clouse, “Chapter 1 Protecting the Public Health: *Tribunal del Protomedicato*” in *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II’s Spain*.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Philip II and his advisers were dissatisfied with the existing medical system, which most Castilians saw as an establishment that did not adequately regulate Spain's medical education. Officials of Philip II recognized that physicians were ill-equipped, had insufficient knowledge of medicine, and lacked proper training to treat the dying men and women during bouts epidemic disease, which, in their view, was causing great danger to the health of the Republic. The *cortes de castilla*³⁴⁰ highlighted their frustrations – and those of the King as well – about the inadequacies of the medical training system in the *actas de castilla* of 1563:

It has been observed that many men, without having studied a year of medicine, quit their studies and leave to other places, and with the false information from the courses that are required for study, they are given a degree of *bachiller*,³⁴¹ and with this degree they go to the pueblos to cure. What ultimately follows from their actions is harm and danger.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Although the *cortes de castilla* had, in theory, privileged rights and had to be consulted before the crown could amend existing laws or levy heavy taxes. In the 1560s, deputies from the *cortes of castilla* complained that their “privileges were being ignored.” Philip II, still, convoked and consulted the *cortes of castilla* mainly because of his “perverse respect for the technicalities of the law, and partly because of his anxiety to remain in touch with outside opinion,” according to John Lynch. While the power dynamics between the crown and the *cortes* is too complex to fully explicate here, it should be understood that Philip II exercised a level of power and influence that surpassed what was permitted by the Constitutions of the *cortes*. John Lynch, “Philip II and the Government of Spain” in *Spain Under the Habsburgs: Empires and Absolutism, 1516-1598* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 207.

³⁴¹ A *bachiller* was the medieval and early modern equivalent of today's bachelor's degree.

³⁴² María Campos Díez, *El Real Tribunal del Protomedicato castellano (siglos XIV-XIX)*, (Cuneca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-la Mancha, 1999), 62

Men with an incomplete education were still granted their *bachiller*, which they used as one form of authentication to practice a medical vocation. Technically speaking, these physicians were not charlatans or quacks who deviated from standard protocol; rather, the system, which was responsible for maintaining standards, produced poorly educated professionals.

The absence of a quality-controlled education was not, surprisingly, the main source of scandal. Men who had wealth could, according to the *Cortes*, use their riches to pay for a degree they had not completed, creating a scenario in which inexperienced men attempted to treat the sick. Much of this fraud resulted from the errors of the *Protomedicato*, which was responsible for maintaining adequate benchmarks for education:

the officials more so for their own interest than for public well-being, have brought so much damage to the health of men, which has led to deaths. Because of money, for business interests, and personal pleas, they have examined and given licenses for curing, medicine, and surgery to many unable persons, who were without knowledge or experience.³⁴³

The critique suggests that many licensed professionals, including “*boticarios* and pharmacists,” were “unable persons” who lacked the proper experience and education, but who were still granted a license. Personal greed, laziness, and the absence of strict standards tarnished the reputation of the *Protomedicato* and the physicians who

³⁴³ Campos Díez, *El Real Tribunal del Protomedicato*, 62.

administered health. Philip adopted a bureaucratic medical institution in a disorganized state from his father, Charles V.

To correct this, the *cortes de castilla* suggested stricter and more rigorous examinations, longer apprenticeships, and closer control over all medical professionals. Philip II, a man who suffered from a wide range of illnesses himself,³⁴⁴ made it a priority to elevate public health standards, and sought to reform the existing medical system more than any of his predecessors. The flaws in the medical examination system and the ill-prepared doctors of the *protomedicato* encouraged Philip to implement an across-the-board revision of the education and the licensing of doctors.³⁴⁵ To address these flaws, Philip, according to Michele Clouse, “expanded [royal] control over the medical profession and dictated the standards for education, practical training, and licensing.”³⁴⁶ To facilitate this overhaul, city governments, such as Avila, now had to “enforce royal legislation on medical matters at the local level.”³⁴⁷

To assist medical reforms of the *protomedicato* and help protect the lives of men and women in the peninsula, an existing communication network was utilized with more

³⁴⁴ Philip II, at times, fasted, which led him to become emaciated. See Geoffrey Parker, *Philip II*. (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 92.

³⁴⁵ Michele Clouse, *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II's Spain*, 45.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

frequency³⁴⁸ to send out warnings of plague – a system which did not work as effectively or with as much urgency before Philip II. In the case of Avila, early sixteenth century outbreaks caused alarm when the disaster affected the province and neighboring villages such as Riofrío and Cardeñosa in 1517, as discussed in chapter 2. Before Philip, emergency procedures to protect the city were set in place once the deadliness of an epidemic came closer to home. In some instances, even when the outbreak was within the province, the city did not begin to isolate itself by sealing out non-residents. For example, Gonzalo de Ayora, a historian from Avila writing in 1518,³⁴⁹ proudly stated that the “whole province [of Avila] was infected by pestilence,” but Avila remained free of any signs of plague, suggesting that the city had not set up an emergency response system.³⁵⁰ Municipal and cathedral records from the same years also confirm that most of the messages that crossed the paths of the *regidores* dealt mainly with local-level disasters, not catastrophes in faraway provinces. When areas closer to Avila became threatened with plague or other epidemic diseases during the reign of Charles V, the

³⁴⁸ See José Antonio Escudero, *Felipe II: el rey en el despacho* (Madrid: Complutense, 2002); Cristina Borreguero Beltrán’s, “Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of New and Information” in *The dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in early modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

³⁴⁹ His work was officially printed in 1519; however, one can safely surmise that given the length of this work, he would have begun writing in 1518. Key details within the text also unequivocally demonstrate that he wrote his treatise before the official publication date.

³⁵⁰ Ayora, *Ávila del Rey*, 58.

regidores alerted their sentinels to stand guard, a frequent occurrence which occurred throughout the sixteenth century.

This is not to suggest that news of epidemics did not arrive or lacked any health measures before the reign of Philip II; rather, the evidence suggests that Philip made substantive changes that intensified and further systematized an existing peninsula-wide emergency response network. Since the Black Death of the fourteenth century, and even earlier, cities and towns communicated with one another to impede the proliferation of epidemic disease.³⁵¹ Under Philip, this mechanism, and the information spread through it, was joined closer to the *protomedicato*, and as a result, the details about how to combat plague became more uniform through the kingdom and followed more closely the parameters of a central bureaucratic medical institution. The crown was therefore able to broadcast cutting edge medical theories to most areas of Castile more effectively than previous generations.

This method of medical communication evolved and matured under the guidance of Philip II and his advisors. Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, Avila received forewarnings – and information concerning natural signs that plague was

³⁵¹ See Carlo Cipolla, *Cristofano and the Plague*

imminent³⁵² – on numerous occasions: 1565,³⁵³ 1571³⁵⁴, 1581-1583,³⁵⁵ 1589-1590,³⁵⁶ and 1597-1602.³⁵⁷ Word of outbreaks in faraway coastal regions of the peninsula reached Avila months, sometimes years, before the epidemic ever reached the dry Castilian landscape. In all cases, as soon as the *regidores* received word of disaster, they ordered the construction of temporary fences to shield areas directly outside of the main city walls, set up plague commissions to handle finances and management of staff, ordered filthy areas to be cleaned, and prevented the free movement of animals within the city walls. Thus, news of catastrophe, generally, activated a set of new and traditional responses in Avila.

One should not, however, hastily conclude that commands from above triggered the mechanisms of a well-oiled machine by which the loyal subjects of the King adhered to his bureaucratic directives. Without any doubt, letters concerning epidemics always

³⁵² In 1571, Avila sets up a “comision de langosta,” which was a committee entrusted to stop the proliferation of and destruction caused by locusts. For experts in early modern Spain, the presence of locusts often was a sign that an epidemic was on the horizon. While this may sound superstitious or unsubstantiated, it was actually a reasonable assessment. Locusts destroy crops, which can, and did, lead to destruction of harvests. Epidemics were often preceded by poor harvest, and therefore, establishing ad hoc commissions to deal with locusts was often intrinsically tied with preventing famine and plague.

³⁵³ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 13, 225-226.

³⁵⁴ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 15, 36-37.

³⁵⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 16, 34; 246-249; 360.

³⁵⁶ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 7-8; 70-73.

³⁵⁷ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 11

had a local response, but they were seldom executed smoothly. Naturally, internal conflicts arose when preparations to guard against plague were initiated. For many reasons, local responses were complex, and demonstrated the multifaceted dimensions of implementing emergency measures. Leaders disagreed with one another, guards were apathetic about their jobs, security measures failed, budgets did not permit more spending, and unexpected bouts of rain destroyed newly constructed gates and fences. To highlight the nuances of these local-level issues, two key epidemics will be examined to cast light on the inner workings of this warning system – both its successes and failures. The 1565 outbreak of Zaragoza and the 1589 epidemic of Catalonia, to a greater or lesser extent, underscore the dynamic push and pull factors between Crown and City and the extent to which the plague broadcast system was effective.

Subsequent accounts of the pestilence of Zaragoza state that the origins began in September of 1564 in the village of Monzón, a small city about 110km east of Zaragoza. That same year, Philip II and his court were in the area to attend the *cortes de Monzón-Barcelona* (1563-1564) when the outbreak started, which prompted “his Majesty to leave with his court from that village, and went to Viesar, and from there to Totosa, and then to Valencia.”³⁵⁸ According to Deigo de Aynsa, a seventeenth century historian of Huesca, the convocation of the *cortes de Monzón*, led to the assembly of “a great number of people who had come to the *cortes*,” many of whom died.³⁵⁹ Eventually, the pestilence

³⁵⁸ Francisco Diego de Aynsa, *Fundación Excelencias, grandezas, y cosas memorables de la antiquísima ciudad de Huesca* (1619), 432.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

extended to the cities of “Zaragoza, Huesca, Iacca, Barbastro, and to other villages and places nearby.”³⁶⁰ Without a doubt, the catastrophe hit closer to home for Philip since the chaos was not too far away from where his Court was travelling and staying for extended periods of time.

As the pestilence gradually spread from town to town, information pertaining to how this disease was spreading began to surface – information which had ramifications for how other cities made their preparations. One particular story stressed how one man, who initially did raise much suspicion, crippled the whole population of one city. In this story, the city of Huesca, a city in Aragón not too far from Zaragoza, “was ignited when it brought in a man who came from Iacca, where they already had the pestilence; providing him stay at the house of a hosier at the plaza of San Lorenzo, the owner of the house, and all those who lived in the house died.”³⁶¹ A foreigner who had come to the city was, in the eyes of some of the residents of Huesca, responsible for tainting the barrios throughout the city, leading to the death of “4,000 people and many more injured.”³⁶² It was this incident in January of 1564, according to subsequent accounts, that allowed the plague to linger until December of 1565. As the plague moved from town to town, it was apparent to many of those in Aragón that sealing off a city and preventing the entrance of foreigners was a matter of life or death. Whether these stories

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 432-433.

³⁶² Ibid., 433.

are true or not is irrelevant. What is important to recognize is that accounts of permitting one stranger to enter Huesca triggered and reinforced ideas of isolationism in other areas of Spain.

Such accounts of an outsider indirectly causing the demise of thousands of men and women, indeed, frightened leaders, and thus, directly and indirectly, shaped how the crown and local governments framed their emergency responses. In his messages to various cities in Spain, Philip and his advisors stressed the importance of shielding the cities from all outsiders who might originate from a province that was suffering from an outbreak. Philip's messages essentially orders the Spanish cities to look after themselves rather than assist those who came from infected regions. Fear and a desire for self-preservation, it appears, was of principal importance.

Even though a general message to reject outsiders from affected areas was sent, French physicians and surgeons who could offer their assistance were welcomed in Huesca. Even though things appeared gloomy to many of the residents of Huesca, Diego de Aynsa noted that "a physician and surgeon who came from France attacked this infirmity with much diligence."³⁶³ Foreign medical experts, not Spanish, apparently were seen as competent and well-trained professionals capable of working with diligence to cure the plague. It can't be determined, of course, how effective their treatments were.

³⁶³ Ibid.

Not all outsiders were rejected, therefore, only the ones who offered no protection from the epidemic.

From March to December of 1564, the outbreak continuously ravaged major population centers of the province of Aragón, especially the villages and towns near Zaragoza. When the pestilence reached Zaragoza, the lethality and ferocity of it increased exponentially, and the residents were not prepared for the looming catastrophe. Historians possess rich details of this plague thanks to Juan Tomas Porcell – one of the leading anatomists and medical experts in Spain – who recorded the signs symptoms and overall conditions of the infirm in his medical treatise *Información y curcación de la peste en Zaragoza*.³⁶⁴ His treatise documented that on one particularly ruinous day up to 800 victims visited the general hospital, which, sadly, did not have the proper resources, manpower, and infrastructure to address the sudden, overwhelming surge of patients.³⁶⁵ Even though the plague had numerous causes, the lack of “doctors and surgeons” were causing “a great number of people to slowly die. And the same has happened in many cities villages and places of the kingdom of Aragon and other kingdoms of Spain.”³⁶⁶ Most affected by this were the poor, who in some instances “were not treated nor visited

³⁶⁴ Juan Tomás Porcell. *Información y curación de la peste de çargoça de 1564* (Çargoça, 1565).

³⁶⁵ Most modern hospitals may also lack the space necessary to accommodate such an influx. Nevertheless, one must take into consideration that most hospitals in Castile had between eight to twelve beds. See Andrés Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila*.

³⁶⁶ See Porcell’s introductory note to Philip II, *Información y curación de la peste de çargoça*, ii.

for three or four days” because of the lack of physicians. Like many of his contemporaries and colleagues, Porcell blamed the insufficiencies of the medical establishment for the uncontrollable proliferation of the pestilence.³⁶⁷

Residents, according to Porcell, did not take the proper precautions to protect themselves from the contagion nor did they seek medical assistance when it was necessary, which worsened conditions. Porcell criticized those who had done nothing when they first become ill, suggesting that the sick “should move with more boldness so that they could be cured.”³⁶⁸ Quickly finding proper medical care was crucial, then, for limiting the spread of the disease. Since residents failed to remedy the illnesses from the onset, the pestilence spread unabated. The sick were given shelter in the general hospital, but when that filled up, they began to congregate near the Torre Nueva. The situation was dire, space in treatment facilities were lacking, and hospitals were understaffed. Porcell recounts that during the height of the epidemic there were “only one doctor and four surgeons.”³⁶⁹

Although Porcell could not curb the disaster himself, his objective was to “inform his Majesty of the essence, causes and accidents of the said plague,” with the intention of making his findings accessible to a wider lay audience and to doctors. To accomplish

³⁶⁷ Porcell ultimately recognizes that it was the sin of men that brought the wrath of God. He still, nonetheless, believed that men of goodwill could limit the extent of the catastrophe. Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

this, he avoided writing his work in Latin, choosing instead to pen the treatise in his “vulgar tongue” so that it could be accessible to “all those who want to make use of it,” especially for “those who practice medicine so that they may treat and cure.”³⁷⁰ Even though he wrote in Spanish, his theories still conformed to the traditions of the “greatest authors of medical knowledge: Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna and Aetio.”³⁷¹

Since it was written in Castilian, Porcell’s medical treatise had the potential to reach a broader audience, which it did, through Philip’s networks of communication. Details concerning the pestilence in Zaragoza reached Philip and his advisors, who then warned the rest of the peninsula about the deadliness of the outbreak. Cities throughout the kingdom received these messages, and Avila was one such. The first official warning of pestilence arrived in July of 1565, about a year after the plague initially struck Aragón. An official letter from the Philip II advising the city council of Avila to seal off the city from outsiders came on 14 July 1565. The letter from the Crown gave a specific example of a city that managed to evade the pestilence, stating that “in that said city for those who are originally from there are well-preserved from the pestilence[...] do what is necessary in order to enclose the city and pay to keep it guarded.”³⁷² Here, Philip gave a specific example of a successful case of isolation, something which he wanted Avila to replicate so that it would not experience the same fate as Zaragoza. Philip’s message harkens back

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 13, 233-236.

to the story in Huesca – those who offered hospitality to an outsider from an infected area were considered to be committing grave error for the well-being of the majority.

The council, following royal commands, immediately ordered that “no person, knight or hidalgo of this city or any class” should bring unapproved persons to his home.³⁷³ The council stressed that this was a “command from his Majesty,” and anyone who broke the commands would be reprimanded. This punishment, of course, was not equal to everyone, and those who were “men of quality” had to pay “one-thousand *maravedís*.” In contrast, individuals who were “not of quality,” had to pay “two-hundred *maravedís*” and were also subject to lashes in public at Mercado Grande.³⁷⁴

A similar command extended to owners of taverns, bodegas and inns. Those who owned such businesses were strictly prohibited to “give food to any stranger unless he brings testimony from where he came and brought his authorization.”³⁷⁵ Those who broke this rule would be subjected to “pain of two hundred lashes.”³⁷⁶ Formally agreeing to the commands, the owners who were present in the council “responded that they will not sell food to strangers as it has been commanded.”³⁷⁷

³⁷³ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 13, 226.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 227

With these measures put in place, the council initiated the construction of a fence, which acted as a barrier to protect all areas of the city from foreigners. Following Philip's decrees, the council commissioned Pedro del Peso to bring "the carpenters of the city in order to make the fences which encloses the city."³⁷⁸ The local government of Avila spared no expense since these walls were ultimately "for the interest of the health of the city," which included their families and friends as well. The purpose of the fence was to keep out "strangers who come from those places where they are dying of pestilence."³⁷⁹ Understanding that construction jobs in the past had been faulty, the council decided to monitor the building process. They emphasized that "there is a necessity that one person acts as a messenger on our behalf for those who are making the walls so that it can be seen what is being made." For that end, they commissioned Juan Velazo to visit the building sites "each day, once in the morning and once in the evening."³⁸⁰ The council also sought to monitor the officials responsible for the construction to make sure that they were correctly using all the funds that was agreed upon. Velazo's job was to also check whether the construction workers were working and that they were "spending all that they had said they would."³⁸¹ In these initial days after Avila received word of the pestilence, Philip II's directives echoed the tribulations

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 226.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 230.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

that some cities in Aragón, especially Huesca, had faced. His forewarnings and message system gathered relevant information and dispatched it to those areas which could become affected in the near future in order to limit the extent of the outbreak.

For months, the city held its guard patiently, and the crown continued to issue warnings of the proliferation and lethality of the outbreak to keep the nobility of Avila updated. The Council made regular adjustments to their protocols at home based upon the letters from Philip. On 13 November, the city reaffirmed their need for “the conservation of the health and wellbeing of this city, which must be guarded with much diligence. Because they are informed that in the city of Valencia [and many others] a great number of people are dead.”³⁸² This concern prompted the council to inform the “hidalgos at the gates of the city who are on guard” to watch the city with more vigilance.³⁸³

As soon as the king proclaimed the end of the epidemic the council put down their guards and permitted the entrance of migrants. On 5 February 1566, an official of the council “read a letter from His Majesty.” According to the King, his trusted medical advisers had determined that “concerning the health, remove the guarding [of the gates].” Just as the guarding of the city had officially begun by the command of the King, it ended just as swiftly, demonstrating one angle of effective power across his kingdom. This official line of command, *se quiten la guarda*, appears numerous times in the second half of the sixteenth century after the end of an epidemic. Although it literally referred to the

³⁸² Ibid., 276

³⁸³ Ibid.

removal of guards and allowing the free passage of migrants and itinerants into the city, it was also a point to mark the official end of the outbreak so that city life could resume its normal course. Modern government institutions have their own specific classifications and categorizations for epidemics, outbreaks, and pandemics – delineating the specificities of each level of catastrophe so that bureaucratic institutions can adequately deploy response measures. Philip II's system was similar in that regard, and the call for *se quiten la guarda* was the formal broadcast that determined the outbreak had ended.

A component of this warning system, as will be demonstrated, was that it both directly and implicitly communicated theories on the origins and methods to combat the plague. Directives from the King on how to combat plague contain key semantic clues on the medical theories present at the royal court. As these ideas moved in conjunction with the warnings, they not only guided Avila on how to combat the plague, but also helped to advance existing medical knowledge.

The 1586-1589 Plague of Catalonia is a second example of the inner workings of this network. Early modern accounts and modern studies state that the plague began in 1589, but smaller pockets of plague were recorded three years earlier in villages north of Barcelona and in southern France. Records from Viella, Bussot, Pont de Suert and other small villages 200-300km away from Barcelona note that public preachers announced the dangers of the plague as early as August of 1586.³⁸⁴ Documents from French cities such

³⁸⁴ José Luis Betrán Moya, "Medicina Popular y Peste en la Barcelona de 1589: el proceso de Mestre Bernat Rigaldia" in *Muerte, Religiosidad, y cultura popular: siglo, xiii-xviii* (Zaragoza: Diputacion de Zaragoza), 285.

as Lyon and Marseilles indicate that the outbreak extended through southern France. In regards to the geographical extent of this plague outbreak, most of the deaths occurred in northeastern Spain and southwestern France on the Mediterranean coast.

Most of the scholarly literature refers to this episode as the Plague of Barcelona, since it was the city that experienced the heaviest casualties. Like most other sixteenth century epidemics of plague in Spain, research pertaining to the reactions to this epidemic is limited, and historians of Catalonia make only passing references to it. Of the few modern histories written on this subject, José Luis Betrán Moya's chapter "Medicina Popular y Peste en La Barcelona de 1589" provides the most well-researched and detailed analyses and also offers important evidence on prevalent medical theories in the region at the time.

Records show that on 7 November, 1588, plague entered Barcelona – most likely from villages and towns closer to the French borders. The *consellers* of Barcelona advised Tarragona of a deadly contagion in the vicinity. Their letter indicated that on All Saint's Day of that year, seven people had died from the pestilence on that day alone.³⁸⁵ Heeding the advice of their compatriots, Tarragona constructed a wall from the baluarte to the church of S. Antonio to prohibit the entrance of anyone coming along the main road from Barcelona in order to protect their city.³⁸⁶ Although it was standard procedure

³⁸⁵ José Sánchez Real, "Estado sanitario de Tarragona a Finales del siglo XVI," *Quaderns d'història tarraconense* 5 (1985): 36.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

in the second half of the sixteenth century to place the guards at the perimeter of the city, the memory of earlier epidemics in Aragón and Valencia likely influenced them to thoroughly isolate themselves.

In this epidemic, two principle causes of disease dominated medical discourses: dirty clothing and contaminated water whereas in previous decades concerns focused on pigsties and general filthiness. As discussed in the Chapter 2, filth and odiferous scents radiating from areas throughout Avila were the key signs of plague-inducing substances. In contrast, tactics shifted in this epidemic as authorities turned their attention to dirty clothing and sources of contaminated water as a cause for the pestilence. Mapping out how new theories moved from place to place is nearly impossible; however, by analyzing the language embedded in the messages sent through Philip's network, one can sketch a rough outline of how these new theories rippled across Spain.

One of the more peculiar municipal ordinances issued in Barcelona and Tarragona in response to the 1589 outbreak fixated on dirty clothing as a source of contagion. If anyone were to have arrived by sea to Tarragona, the ordinance required that they bathe themselves with their clothes on, so that they could clean their bodies and also decontaminate the odors emanating from the fabric.³⁸⁷ The authorities Barcelona also adopted such theories on the origins of the epidemic. According to the Jesuit Pere Gil, it was only after someone had "brought infected clothes, that it produced the contagion and

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

death,” that ravaged the city.³⁸⁸ The details of this account and its theoretical origins are of the utmost importance to establish how ideas of disease transmission travelled from coastal cities to the central region of the peninsula.

Even though tracing the precise movement of ideas from locality to locality is not possible, Philip’s network did operate as *one* of the means to diffuse such theories. The notion that fabric could be a vector of disease transmission extended beyond Catalonia and entered into Avila at least in part through royal directives, compelling its leaders to adopt appropriate measures. The existing documents from Avila do not fully expound the theories or rationale behind a focus on contaminated clothing, but they do demonstrate that the city council in Avila made efforts to remove contaminated clothing and other things suspected of causing harm.

Another potential cause of this epidemic that gained prominence was contaminated water – an idea which eventually spread to other major cities in Spain. Subsequent accounts state that “The origin of this bad thing was the poison placed in the stoups of holy water.”³⁸⁹ Water might serve as a means to purify and detoxify contaminated clothing and contagious bodies, but at the same time, water could have been deliberately poisoned by men of ill-will, or so some of the authorities thought. Unto itself, water represents life; however, contaminated, spoiled, or poisoned waters signify the opposite: sickness and death.

³⁸⁸ José Luis Betrán Moya, “Medicine Popular y Peste en la Barcelona de 1589,” 286.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

Stories of pestilence from Catalonia grabbed Philip's attention, prompting him to relay dispatches to cities throughout Spain, including Avila, some 650km away from Barcelona. Through this system, discourses concerning contaminated sources of water and dirty clothing as vectors of disease rippled across the peninsula. While the expansion of bureaucracy is often seen in a negative light, here it was used primarily to preserve the lives men. The expansion and bureaucratization of this network demonstrates Philip's willingness and desire to preserve the lives of as many able-bodied men as possible – capable men who were needed to be sent off to war to fight in far off lands. The Battle of Lepanto, the destruction of the Spanish armada, the Anglo-Spanish wars, and the Dutch Revolt were just a handful of conflicts in which the Spanish Empire sought to intensify its power. Having men and women die by the tens thousands back at home stymied his political ambitions abroad. Through this network, Philip could contain the wrath of God and advance his ambitions of territorial gain. In this context medical theories from Catalonia, channeled through Philip, entered Avila in the late 1580s, altering local public health policies.

Official news of pestilence first arrived to Avila on 16 September, 1589, approximately ten months after the outbreak was first recorded in Barcelona. A royal provision arrived directing the *corregidor* to announce that a serious outbreak was striking Catalonia and threatened other parts of the kingdom: “the peste that they have in some places and villages of the Principality of Catalonia and the danger of this bad

contagion is running its course [...] This city should be guarded.”³⁹⁰ With the reception of this letter, the city began a series of measures to guard against the plague, which were referred to as *la guarda de peste*.

Upon hearing the news of plague, the city immediately placed guards at the gates, just as it had done in previous years. *Regidores* were put in charge of finding competent men to guard the major entrance points around the city:

Concerning this matter: the city named [certain] *regidores* so that they raise the said *guarda* by putting up the gates and others things. To the *regidores*: Velanunes and Don Pedro Davila Delaguida and those writing to Blas de Serrera, *solicidador* and *procurador* in his majesty for this city, that it may take the provision for all the justifiable expenses for this guard, closing the city and other things that were made.³⁹¹

The ordering of men and compensating them financially were of chief importance, and it was one of the first things addressed whenever an outbreak occurred.

As during the 1565 plague of Zaragoza, construction workers began to enclose the city with a makeshift fence to prevent foreigners from contagious areas entering the outer areas of the city. Although Avila had excellent fortifications that encircled the center of the city, the council frequently ordered the construction of additional fences to protect the churches, homes, sanctuaries, religious houses, and parishes that were located just outside the main city walls. The council ordered that

³⁹⁰ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 8.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 8.

On this day Blas de Herrera read in this *ayuntamiento* a letter, from His Majesty, which he states to pay one-hundred thousand *maravedis*, for what might be spent enclosing the city for *la guarda de la peste*. The city conformed, above all, commanded it to be made.³⁹²

The *regidores* commissioned to handle the logistics of *la guarda de peste* were compensated financially, and a salary was agreed upon by all of those in the council. Guarding the city's perimeter presented challenges that the council fully understood. For example, they permitted the *hidalgos* to guard some areas on their horses. "The city agrees that the *regidores* don del Aguila Vela Nuñez in prosecution of his commission, which it was necessary so that the walls may not be damaged, they [the guards] may guard it on horses."³⁹³

On 14 October 1589, Avila, following similar procedures implemented in Valladolid, prevented the entrance of all people and clothing which might originate from areas near Barcelona. The language of the Avila decree focuses on exclusion of peoples and clothing, thus demonstrating how theories of disease transmission functioned in Avila:

this day a letter was read from the justice and council of the village of Valladolid [...] it says that the city is protecting itself from Barcelona and other parts from the peste, which is there. They do not allow the entrance of any type of clothing nor other suspicious things [in Valladolid], unless they bring testimony from a notary [...] and just like over there, it will be done in this city. It will be preached

³⁹² Ibid., 25.

³⁹³ Ibid.

and advertised from the consistory of this city. They [foreigners] may provide their testimony at the gates [...] the ones without it may not come in and a seal of the city will be placed on their documents [...] all who do not carry testimony will not be admitted.³⁹⁴

Verification was crucial, and in the early modern period, documents signed by a notary operated as a form of authentication, which could in some instances permit free travelling. While Avila did establish a cordon, they did not implement any measure to eradicate contaminated clothing.³⁹⁵

The council instead focused on eliminating internal sources of contagion, namely, unsanitary water. On 17 October, the city ordered that “six *ducados*” be set aside for the cleaning of the “trough in *mercado chico*,”³⁹⁶ which was located directly outside of consistory where the city council met. In addition, a new spring, which could provide fresh water for the residents, was discovered next to the “trough of the beasts.”³⁹⁷ This new source of water could bring much relief to an ongoing drought. To that end, the council decided to build a fount at this location; however, the council recognized the need to decontaminate the spring for the health of the city.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 28.

³⁹⁵ The council initiated a campaign to eradicate all contaminated fabrics in 1599-1600, a topic which will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 37.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

Most importantly, the city continued to erect fortifications, and carefully monitored the progress, seeking to patch any gaps in the defenses. Very specific instructions were given to close off certain passages in the city and to prohibit movement in some streets. With much diligence, the *regidores* hired men to examine areas that were most vulnerable to outsiders entering into the city. One of those men, Ochoa de Aguirre, informed the council “that there is a street which goes up from San Francisco to the place of the discalced [carmelites],” which was still opened.³⁹⁸ Although hermetically enclosing the city might seem like a futile task, the council sought to wall off each gap “so that one is able to enter through it.”³⁹⁹ Records detail how the city responded to Ochoa de Aguirre’s survey of the enclosure, and ordered that “a large stone wall is to be made between the street which goes from San Francisco up to the gate of *la guarda de pestelencia*.”⁴⁰⁰ Likewise, Don Sancho Cinbrón, a *regidor*, was to oversee the construction of “gates at the street Juela which goes up to Santa Cruz.”⁴⁰¹

Despite their efforts to seal off the city, the council’s plans were often suspended or completely halted because of fierce rain and flooding. In October of 1589, torrential rains brought much needed relief to the drought-stricken region; however, the sudden arrival of the downpour also brought new issues with the building up of the wall, since

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

the persistent, aggressive rain destroyed some walls, which then needed to be reconstructed.

The city has tried to protect what was necessary, which included the enclosing some *portillos* for *la guarda de peste*. Because of the quantity of rain which has fallen, which was destructive for some parts [of the wall]. [We have] agreed and commanded to ask for a new royal license, so that donations can be made for the one-hundred thousand *maravedís* to rebuild some walls which have fallen in many parts.⁴⁰²

Even though the city followed the orders of Philip's advisers as closely as possible, unpredictable, meteorological conditions led to the collapse of walls. The breakdown potentially allowed infected outsiders to enter the city. Recognizing the security risk, the council commanded one of the *regidores* to remedy the issue: "The city commissioned the *regidor* Don Alonso Navarro to close up the *paredón* [thick wall] which goes from [the streets near] San Antón to the streets of the *coros*. [The money] which is to be spent comes from the *maravedís* of the *sisa* which is under the safeguard of our own butler."⁴⁰³ Even though capricious weather halted the construction of the fences, the council did what it could to quickly repair what had been damaged.

In addition to problems caused by weather, numerous lawsuits concerning *la guarda de peste* emerged. Dozens of ongoing construction projects, hiring of security, and disrupting the normal ebb and flow of commerce into the city, all generated complaints. Under normal circumstances, litigants brought their complaints to judges in

⁴⁰² Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 38b

the city. Litigants could file an appeal, which would then go to a higher court. For Avila – and all towns and cities north of the Tagus River – cases went to the *chancillería de Valladolid*, which handled civil and criminal cases. Since the *Chancillería de Valladolid* received numerous cases from Avila during the year of the *guarda de peste*. To handle such matters directly, the *regidores* entrusted Don Franco “to go to Valladolid in person to settle these matters.”⁴⁰⁴ The fact that a higher court received several appeals from litigants in Avila suggests that some residents were dissatisfied with how the *guarda de peste* was being implemented.

Guards were also discontent and grew apathetic with the *guarda de peste*. Those who worked directly on behalf of the city, such as the *hidalgos* who guarded the gates, had difficulties taking their jobs seriously. As for many sentinels or even modern day security guards, the mundane task of watching gates could be taxing and tiresome. For example, guards in Avila, it seems, began to take longer lunches than necessary. The lackadaisical attitude of some of the guards eventually became apparent to many of the residents, which prompted the *corregidor* to take action. On the 4 November, 1589, the city records note several complaints concerning the how the guards were not fulfilling their duties with diligence and care. Rather than being vigilant, they were taking long lunches and having snacks as they rode their horses around town.

The *caballeros regidores*, who are present, know about and confirmed the excesses that there are. The lunches – which were given for the *caballeros*

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 47.

hidalgos, who guarded the *puertas* for the *peste* –should not be allowed. And [They] petitioned his majesty the said *corregidor* to fix it.”⁴⁰⁵

Clearly, even though the crown and local government had a specific agenda that they desired to execute, the average *hidalgo* was not so enthusiastic about *la guarda de peste*, preferring instead to enjoy a casual meal during their shift.

The *corregidor* addressed this lack of discipline with haste. Concerned by accusations of these extravagant and excessive lunches, the city ordered, “no person of whichever state and condition who is at the said gates shall not carry any food or snacks for the said guards. For each offense, they will suffer the pain of ten days in jail and ten-thousand *maravedís*.”⁴⁰⁶ Jail time and a hefty fine may have put some of the guards in check, but also demonstrate that while fear, anxiety, and tension may have consumed the municipal authorities, the average construction worker, guards, or their families who prepared food, may not have been as concerned with the epidemic.

News of pestilence and medical theories spread from region to region through networks of communication, and while some similarities in responses to pestilence did exist, each locality reacted to royal commands in different ways. Local authorities in Avila did what they could to execute plans to protect the city; however, unpredictable weather, poorly constructed fences, and lack of discipline among the *hidalgos*

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 49, 50.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

demonstrate that responses were not uniform throughout the peninsula, even though the messages sent from the crown to the towns and cities were virtually identical.

Doctor for Hire: Royal Certifications That Pay

In light of the changing perceptions of the medical profession due to Philip's ongoing reforms of the Protomedicato in the late sixteenth century, one of the key strategies employed by many cities and villages was to hire royally approved doctors, who were viewed as being more knowledgeable, competent and trustworthy compared to earlier generations of physicians. Unlike previous generations, university trained physicians now had to go through rigorous exams, years of training and apprenticeship, certification, and years of formal and practical education. While this training may not have directly influenced the well-being of the patients, the reforms undoubtedly transformed the perception and dignity of the medical field, meaning that there was a greater demand for their services. It was a top priority, then, for some authorities to gather whatever resources they could to bring in a new generation of physicians, especially during times of crises. Even though local governments had tight budgets and lack of funds due to the precursors of the Castilian Crisis⁴⁰⁷, they made concerted efforts to bring in better-trained physicians, who could perhaps prevent or bring relief to the

⁴⁰⁷ Historians often point to the early seventeenth century as the beginning of the Castilian Crisis. Most of these historians would agree, however, that the genesis of this crisis had its roots in the late sixteenth century. For a more thorough discussion of this financial downfall, see *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*.

pestilence. This section examines how the city council of Avila sought to acquire such a medical professional, and the internal political conflicts that arose among the *regidores* during the hiring process.

Sixteenth century Spanish physicians were both trusted and looked upon with disdain; however, these perceptions could temporarily change, particularly during epidemics. Michael Solomon brilliantly articulated, “there was no occupation in late medieval and early modern Spain that simultaneously inspired more blind trust and more intense suspicion than the medical profession. Physicians were both desperately needed and thoroughly detested.”⁴⁰⁸ While Solomon highlights the two opposing popular viewpoints of the early modern physician, during times of plague, fear of death likely instilled more “blind trust” in the average, university-trained physician. Not surprisingly then, hiring new physicians was a common practice in sixteenth century Spain.⁴⁰⁹ According to Michele Clouse, larger cities throughout Castile often solicited “the services of elite, university-trained practitioners,” who in many instances “advised local authorities on the proper regulation of other medical practitioners in the town.”⁴¹⁰ Avila was a prime example of such a city. At the recommendation of the *corregidor*, the council sought to allocate enough financial resources to bring in a properly trained,

⁴⁰⁸ Michael Solomon, *Fictions of well-being*, 44.

⁴⁰⁹ For the case of Seville, see Alexandra and Noble Cook, *The Plague Files*.

⁴¹⁰ Clouse, *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II's Spain*, 147.

licensed physician to watch over, regulate, and advise the numerous medical professionals in Avila.

To that end, a nobleman of the city council was selected to oversee the hiring process, so that a man of good standing could come to Avila to offer his skills. On 19 September, 1589, the council entrusted Don Estaban de Aguila, a nobleman and *regidor*, concerning “the business of the commission of bringing a physician to this city.”⁴¹¹ Don Estaban’s task was to find someone, an outsider, who had been properly trained under the newly revamped medical curriculum and who possessed a royal license which could validate his experience and worthiness. It is important to recognize that it was ultimately the *corregidor*, acting as an extension of the King, who first suggested the acquisition of a trained physician. In 1589, dozens of physicians and medical experts were already working in the many medical hospitals and charitable centers in Avila, which were operated and controlled by the Diocese of Avila and local confraternities. The call for a new chief physician sought not to usurp the role of the existing traditional medical establishment, which was financially and politically connected to the Church. Rather, it suggested a level of discontent and dissatisfaction with the proficiency and skill of the medical professionals who had been treating patients in Avila.

After the city council completed its search, the council “turned to the *regidores* Don Enrique Davila and Don Estevan de Aguila,” who recommended a *medico* named

⁴¹¹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 9

Doctor Baez.⁴¹² The minutes from the consistory do not indicate which hospital Doctor Baez would manage. cathedral and municipal records simply state that he would serve as a *medico*, and make little reference to what his exact duties and responsibilities were.

The details pertaining to this job request are a bit murky, since the municipal records do not provide a clear image of what the precise responsibilities of this new physician would have been. The *Beneficencia* of the *Archivo Histórico Provincial de Avila* contains tens of thousands of folios from the five main hospitals of Avila, and one could hope that answers would be found in the paper trail left behind by the hospitals.⁴¹³ However, most of the details within these boxes deal with expenditures and donations, not the culture, logistics, and case studies from the hospitals. Thus, it is challenging – if not impossible – to reconstruct the duties and obligations of this new physician’s role. Since virtually all of the hospitals were fully staffed in 1589, what could be lacking? Were the conditions of the hospitals not satisfactory to the residents of Avila? Did the doctors not fulfill their duties as outlined in the hospitals’ constitutions?

A few reasonable deductions can be made with the limited available information, using the constitutions of each of the major hospitals. These records show that the physicians of Avila staffed each of the primary hospitals, along with other medical personnel such as nurses, surgeons, pharmacists, and *boticarios*. Doctor Baez’s role, most likely, was to advise and regulate the pre-existing medical establishment. The

⁴¹² Ibid., 14

⁴¹³ The most thorough analysis of the basic functions of the hospitals in early modern Avila is Andrés Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila*.

constitutions of the *Hospital de Dios Padre* and the *Hospital de Santa Escolastica* some insights to the new city physician's professional obligations within the municipality. In most of the hospitals throughout Avila, one to two *medicos* were assigned, depending on the year and the availability of funds. The constitutions outline that the *medico* must make two visits to the patients each day, one in the morning and once in the evening, to check up on the well-being of the patients and to further assess their condition.⁴¹⁴ The patron of the hospital – who was a nobleman and often times a *regidor* – had the authority to name and remove *medicos* depending on their competence. Hiring new doctors and firing them was a common procedure that occurred in all the hospitals throughout Avila in the early modern period, but the acquisition of Doctor Baez sparked a controversy among the *regidores*.

The cost of hiring Doctor Baez was staggering, especially given that the city was already paying for numerous fortifications and security to watch the city. The meeting on the 30 September, 1589 stated that the city would pay Doctor Baez a “salary of 50,000 *maravedís* each year,” which was an exorbitant salary for a *medico* in Avila.⁴¹⁵ To give some context on this amount, a surgeon named Licenciado Morán from the *Hospital de Santa Escolastica* earned an annual 9,000 *maravedís* salary in 1590. That same year, another *medico*, Valdivieso, earned 6,000 *maravedís* at *Santa Escolastica*.⁴¹⁶ Standing

⁴¹⁴ Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila*, 175.

⁴¹⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 14.

⁴¹⁶ Sánchez Sánchez, *La Beneficencia en Ávila*, 215.

before the council, Doctor Baez possessed all of the documentation and external appearances of university trained physician, which persuaded the council to hire him for his services. The justification for bringing in a *medico* at such a high cost, even though the city was struggling financially, was the fact that Doctor Baez fit the bill of a suitable medical professional.

In an age where confirming a person's status and profession was less than certain, analyzing certificates and checking for proper appearances were, in many circumstances, the only tools available to verify a man's position. Possessing the correct, valid documentation meant that the paper had to have the correct seals, stamps, and signatures. Avila, like the rest of Western Europe, had followed these protocols of identity verification since the late medieval period; it was then the responsibility of the city council to authenticate Baez's claims with the verification system that they had in place.⁴¹⁷

Thus, it is no surprise that one of the main conditions for hiring Baez was that as long as he had his "license from his majesty," he would be hired. Since the doctor was able to provide the requisite documentation, the position was made open to him. This was, however, only one of the forms of verification mentioned in the records. The *regidores*, in all likely circumstances, looked for key cultural markers intrinsically tied to the physician's profession from sixteenth century Spain to also verify his identity. As an

⁴¹⁷ Valentin Groubner, *Who Are You?: Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*, trans. by Mark Kyburz and John Peck (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

official doctor, Doctor Baez would have dressed in long velvet clothing, wore an emerald ring on his thumb (a piece of jewelry that highlights the healing abilities of his office), had a long well-kempt⁴¹⁸ beard⁴¹⁹, and sported a large taffeta hat.⁴²⁰ Fancy clothing was not merely a sign of ostentation and a taste in high culture. Rather, his external appearances were key symbolic markers that demonstrated his years of training and hands-on experience with medical treatment. If a doctor did not possess a sufficient amount of gold jewelry or the proper attire, it indicated to the clients that the doctor had not earned enough money throughout his career to purchase these garbs. After verifying the appropriate paperwork, Don Enrique Davila, who was one of the *regidores* in charge of this matter, “paid Doctor Baez 50,000 *maravedís*” for his first year of service.⁴²¹ Dr. Baez, standing before the council, accepted the money, concluding the meeting without any conflicts or disputes.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Hair had to be maintained and combed daily to demonstrate a sanitary lifestyle. The theory was that combing the hair aired out the harmful “vapors” that had accumulated. A strict regimen of combing one’s hair and beard was an expectation to maintain health for oneself and those around them. Similar to job interviews of today, a disheveled look would have likely meant that Baez was not fit for the position. See Anastasio Rojo Vega, *Enfermos y sanadores en la Castilla del siglo XVI* (Valladolid: Secretario de Publicaciones, 1993), 77-82.

⁴¹⁹ Although some professionals may have not had a beard, Rojo Vega asserts that long beards signified experience and maturity. Younger, less experienced doctors had shorter beards or none at all. Rojo Vega, *Enfermos y sanadores en la Castilla*, 9.

⁴²⁰ Clouse, *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II’s Spain*, 43; Rojo Vega, *Enfermos y sanadores en la Castilla*, 9.

⁴²¹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19,14

⁴²² Ibid.

Soon after the conclusion of this meeting however, this seemingly conventional search for a trained physician sparked a debate amongst the nobility – a dispute which offers important insights into the state of medical care during epidemics, the trustworthiness of medical professional and the perceptions of the effectiveness of Philip II's reforms of the protomedicato and the medical education program of Spain. The debate highlights the flaws of the medical establishment in sixteenth century Spain. Most importantly, a careful reading of these texts reveal the deeply embedded mentalities that Castilians had about their local doctors and hospitals. One week after all of the agreements with Doctor Baez were formally made, news of his hiring spread to the rest of the city, which sparked outrage in one of Avila's leaders and prompted a debate in the *ayuntamiento*. Standing before the council, Francisco de Soria said that he recently received word "that the city has received Doctor Baez, physician, to serve as an official medico for ten years with a 50,000 *maravedís* salary each year" in Avila.⁴²³ De Soria firmly rejected the hiring of this physician on the grounds that his exorbitant salary was not justifiable. The money, de Soria argued, could not be given to Baez from the rents of Avila because the city simply "does not have the money."⁴²⁴ Michele Clouse noted that a trained university medical professional often earned around "5,000 to 10,000 *maravedís*" as a "base salary for physicians in service to the municipality."⁴²⁵ These wages were the

⁴²³ Ibid., 23.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Clouse, *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II's Spain*, 146.

same for larger cities such as Seville, Madrid, and Valladolid. In rare circumstances, some cities offered a base contract of 25,000 *maravedís*.⁴²⁶ In context of the salaries of medical staff of Avila and the rest of Castile, Doctor Baez then was securing an exceptionally lucrative position. De Soria's argument was reasonable, since given the context of wages for physicians in early modern Spain, the salary proposed for Doctor Baez was virtually unheard of as we see here. Shifting the focus of the debate, de Soria further asserted that the "royal license may not even be his own," placing doubt on Doctor Baez's character and trustworthiness.⁴²⁷ Fear and mistrust of wandering charlatans who carried forged or stolen papers was a common occurrence in early modern Europe, and therefore, de Soria's concern represented a valid mistrust not outside of the realm of possibility.⁴²⁸ Not only was it financially irresponsible to agree to such a contract, but, for de Soria, it was not wise to bring in an outsider when so many swindlers roamed through Castile.

Several *regidores* disagreed with de Soria and entered into the debate to voice their concern, arguing that the salary was justified given that so many Catalonians were suffering. On 7 October, 1589 the main proponent of hiring the new physician was

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁴²⁷ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 23.

⁴²⁸ This was a common phenomenon throughout western Europe in the early modern era. For a thorough overview see Roy Porter's, *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); for examples in France see Matthew Ramsey *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770-1830: The Social World of Medical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Antonio de Muñoz Hierro, who argued that the acquisition of the doctor “was for a very great necessity” which “all the residents of the city petitioned to the council with many requests.”⁴²⁹ It was not the will of the council; rather, pleas from the people drove the council to hire Doctor Baez, Muñoz Hierro contended. Muñoz Hierro advanced his argument further by stating that some residents were so insistent about bringing a new physician to the city that “there were some who said that they would sell one of their two beds in order to pay the salary of the *medico*.”⁴³⁰ This was the main reason, according to Muñoz Hierro, that the nobleman in the council, with the blessing of the *corregidor*, found an apt physician who was capable of fulfilling the demands of the people.

These petitions from the residents of Avila are one echo of voices “from below” that we can analyze to gain a better understanding of popular perceptions of medicine. Since the plague had not yet arrived to Avila, their petition, which had not survived itself, suggests three main things. One, they were not satisfied with the local doctors, which prompted them to seek a university-trained physician who was licensed by the crown. Second, their fear of the coming plague was palpable since some were even willing to give up personal belongings to offset the cost of the salary. Third, and most importantly, the residents who made several requests to the council trusted in the official medical establishment and the reforms of the Crown. Based on the city council records, it appears

⁴²⁹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 23.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

that the residents trusted in the king's system, since they demanded a licensed professional.

After much debate, all of the council members submitted their votes, and the results indicated that all of them supported Antonio de Muñoz Hierro's position. De Soria presented a reasonable case in front of his peers, but in the end, a severe pestilence was causing enormous destruction, which may have influenced their decision. Budget and debt may be one of the last concerns if one's life is being threatened. Even though the council had resolved this issue, they still had to secure funds for Doctor Baez. They agreed to make a provision to take a percentage from the selling of wine to pay for his services to the city.⁴³¹

This case demonstrates how Castilians perceived the medical establishment with both "blind trust" and cautious skepticism. Although distrust and skepticism was common, many residents of Avila, both noble and common, had confidence in a medical professional who presented all of the necessary paperwork.

Mulberry Trees: A Health Hazard?

In the same meeting that the city council debated the justification of hiring on Doctor Baez, the city also prepared for the epidemic by addressing other concerns: hiring men to clean up pigsties, building fences around the city, preventing animals from freely

⁴³¹ Ibid.

roaming through the city, and placing men at the gates to check the documentation of foreigners and preventing any suspected of contamination from entering. While most of these were normal occurrences, on the 30 September, 1589, the same day the council deliberated upon Doctor. Baez, the council commissioned Don de Quiñones to write a letter to a resident who may have unknowingly been causing harm to the city. The council suggested that Luis Guillamas, who owned a home and a garden next to the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites, cut and completely remove the roots of the mulberry tree in his garden. The council urged that “the roots which enter the city from within” were a cause for “danger to the general health.”⁴³² What is so puzzling about this message is that it is not clear why or how the mulberry tree was causing harm to the health of other residents. Was it because mulberry trees and the fruit that they bear somehow created miasma to perhaps spread plague? Was there a spiritual, religious, or superstitious reason behind this targeting this mulberry tree? The municipal logs provide no thorough explanation, even though several pages detail this incident, and the main message is clear: the tree needed to be unrooted because it was harmful to the health of the city during the epidemic.

Analysis of early modern medical, pharmaceutical, and botanical treatises demonstrate, without equivocation, that mulberry trees were seen as beneficial and salubrious. Andres de Laguna, a sixteenth century Spanish pharmacologist and botanist, who translated and annotated *Pedacio Dioscorides Anazarbeo* in 1555, commented that

⁴³² Ibid., 22

“the ancients rightly called it [mulberry trees] the most prudent plant.”⁴³³ In regards to its fruit he referred to it as “pleasant and flavorful, when paired with meat and wine.”⁴³⁴ The mature fruit of the mulberry also aids digestion by “relaxing the bowels.” Most importantly for this discussion, it was “useful for medicines,” and could be “administered as the last remedy in those who have dysentery, and in those who have flux of the bowels.” To add to these numerous benefits, the leaves were thought to be a natural analgesic, which “are [especially] useful for toothaches.”⁴³⁵ With the many health benefits that Laguna and Dioscorides praised in mulberries, it is no surprise that ancient and early modern doctors and pharmacists did not question the beneficial properties of mulberries. As one final positive characteristic, Laguna contended that mulberry trees were, ultimately, useful “for the maintenance of silk worms, which make silk.” While silk was widely recognized throughout Europe as a luxury commodity, it also had several benefits for the mind and body, according to Laguna.⁴³⁶

The health benefits of mulberries were undeniable, but it was primarily for financial reasons that mulberry trees were brought to the Iberian Peninsula. The Mulberry trees in Avila represented a source of wealth, since the leaves could be used to feed silk worms. Silk cultivation, which was a lucrative enterprise in the in the early

⁴³³ Dioscorides, *Pedacio Dioscorides Anazarbeo, anotado por el doctor Andres Laguna* trans. by Andrés de Laguna (1555), 116.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

modern era, had been introduced to Spain in the late fifteenth century. The mulberry trees used for silk cultivation initially arrived in Murcia between the years of 1480-1530 in relatively small numbers.⁴³⁷ By the late sixteenth century, however, their numbers grew exponentially to around 355,000 mulberry trees, which were diffused throughout Murcia, according to Licenciado Cascales (1564-1642).⁴³⁸ All of these mulberry trees contributed to a silk boom in the late sixteenth century, bringing in wealth and economic vitality to a peninsula that was constantly spending its resources on military campaigns abroad. Even though the Spanish economy was suffering greatly, the silk industry was thriving thanks to the mulberry tree. In an economic sense, mulberry trees were seen as a fountain of wealth.

Religious discourses from sixteenth century Avila, as well, established positive metaphors using mulberry trees. One notable example comes from Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, where she used an analogy with silk worms and mulberry trees. She wrote,

You must have already heard about His marvels manifested in the way silk originates, for only He could have invented something like that [...] When warm weather comes and the leaves begin to appear on the mulberry tree, the seeds start to live, for they are dead until then. The worms nourish themselves on mulberry leaves until, having grown to full size, they settle on some twigs. There with their little mouths they themselves go about spinning the silk and making some very little cocoons in which they enclose themselves [...] The silkworm symbolizes the soul which begins to live when, kindled by the Holy Spirit, it commences using the ordinary aids given by God to all, and applies the remedies left by Him in His

⁴³⁷ Pedro Miralles Martínez, *Seda, Trabajo y Sociedad en la Murcia del Siglo XVII*, (2000)

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

Church, such as regular confession, religious books, and sermons; these are the cure for a soul dead in its negligence and sins and liable to fall into temptation.⁴³⁹

Here the mulberry tree and its leaves act as the “Holy Spirit” and “aids given by God to all,” which nourish and feed “the soul” so that it can be remedied. In this parable, which comes from one of the most respected saints of Avila, the mulberry tree and its fruit were a metaphor for God’s graces,

In a medical, economic, and spiritual sense, the language and ideas associated with mulberry trees were overwhelmingly positive. Since virtually all the documentation available on mulberry trees from this period suggested it was not harmful to human health, what could have triggered the council to say that this it was bringing great harm to the city? In the absence of other evidence, we can speculate that the mulberry tree’s very existence rested on one negative attribute: mulberry trees consume substantial amounts of water. An abundance of water and a temperate climate allow mulberry trees to thrive.⁴⁴⁰ According to Miguel Hernández, Murcia had to install additional irrigation systems in order to supply a steady stream of water to the mulberry trees in drier regions. Local fountains and intermittent sources of water could also be used to irrigate the trees in Murcia. In 1589 however, Avila did not have this luxury since water was in such short supply because of an ongoing drought.

⁴³⁹ Theresa of Avila *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol 2*. The Interior Castle.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

A close analysis of the municipal records indicates that Avila had experienced a severe drought the summer before news of plague had arrived. This drought was so severe that it halted construction projects and prompted city officials to hire teams to look for water:

The city commanded to give money to Lucas Dávila [in the amount of] 50 *reales* for the occupation which he has this year. [His job is to bring] the water from the fountains to the monasteries and other areas and to the city at night and at day because of the dryness that there was this summer.⁴⁴¹

Lucas Dávila special task was to fetch and carry water from a distant reservoir to monasteries and other areas throughout the city in order to bring much needed relief. It should be emphasized that the council commissioned Dávila because of the extraordinary environmental conditions. Water was a scarce resource the year before the pestilence, and therefore, it would not have been prudent to use it to cultivate mulberry trees, which was a cornerstone for silk production.

Problems prevalent throughout the city during the years between plagues became more urgent during epidemics. For example, we can see that the lack of water, which was an issue not directly related to the epidemic, also entered into the discussions concerning *la guarda de peste*. Even though the lack of water was a health concern during the summer, only when the plague arrived did the council directly address this matter with some urgency, as indicated by demanding the removal of the mulberry tree.

⁴⁴¹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 19, 22b

Another key example was when the council entrusted Don Francisco de Quiñones to find men to “clean certain springs” which was easily accessible to the public.⁴⁴² The location of this spring was near one of the “great arches made of brick,” and the source of the water ultimately arrived at the plaza of *Mercado Grande*, an area where many residents congregated. The city council, which understood the dire need of water, commanded that all construction of the fountain be suspended until the source of the water, namely the spring, was made entirely clean. Furthermore, on 17 October, 1589, “The city commanded to give six *ducados* to pay for the cleaning of the fountains of *Mercado Chico* [...] the source of which was where the springs have been discovered.”⁴⁴³ A dry summer season made the *abulenses* concerned with finding adequate sources of water, but also assuring that it was clean enough to drink. To assure that it was clean, on 4 November, Antonio Flores de Soto was entrusted to oversee the construction of completing the fountain, so that the new source of water was not contaminated. Even though sources of water had been discovered, it needed to be pristine, since it could potentially be injurious to those who drank from it.

Luckily for Avila, relief soon arrived in the form of a torrential downpour, bringing water to the parched landscape. Rain began to pour in October, inundating areas of the city. The downpour however created a new dilemma since it destroyed some of

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

the newly constructed fences for the *guarda de peste*, which the council now had to rebuild.

Thus, a three-way tension between abnormal weather conditions, fear of the pestilence, and the council's drive to remove all things injurious to human health during the year of the epidemic explain why Luis Guillama was ordered to cut down and completely uproot his mulberry tree. After examining spiritual, economic, and medical discourses concerning mulberry trees, it was determined that they were all overwhelmingly positive in the sixteenth century. Yet, when analyzing records from the year before the order to remove his mulberry tree, we can better understand the council's rationale. The scarcity of water because of the ongoing drought prompted the city council to find new sources of clean water and hire men to bring water from distant reservoirs. During such conditions, mulberry trees, which require lots of water to fully blossom, consumed much needed resources. Even though the city knew of the mulberry tree, it was only during the epidemic that the city council complained that the tree was harmful to the health of the city. Thus, older anxieties and concerns were addressed and reinterpreted during times of epidemics.

Conclusion:

According to Geoffrey Parker, “Capital starvation and over taxation were two of the reasons for Spain’s economic crisis in the 1590’s, and both were the direct result of Philip II’s imperialism.”⁴⁴⁴ While Parker is correct in his assessment, other important precursors contributed to this crisis as well. Philip II called upon local governments to protect the cities and take measures to prevent plague from entering, but many of these demands were costly. On a practical level, the expenditures during *la guarda de peste* put Avila in an enormous financial crisis, and the nobility grew tired of the king’s demands.

By the early 1590s, anger and frustration at the crown infuriated some of the residents in Avila. The trouble began in October 1591 when several broadsheets were put up complaining of the high taxes and the king’s policy of keeping the nobles out of government. Don Diego Brazamonte, famously, was held responsible for this action and sentenced to death.⁴⁴⁵ Other areas in Spain experienced similar incidences of rioting and sedition. One of the main reason for this general discontent was mounting failures of fiscal policies.

While starvation and taxation were key reasons for discontent, during times of epidemics cities had to utilize their available resources to construct walls, hire men to

⁴⁴⁴ Geoffrey Parker, “Introduction” in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1978), 180

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 183-184.

protect the city, prohibit the entrance of certain goods, and ensure that businesses could not serve foreigners – factors which placed additional strain and stress on an already fragile economy. By 1596, many of these conditions had not improved and some even worsened. Riots, failures in harvest, and over-taxation paved the way for one of the deadliest epidemics in Spain, which, in some estimates, took the lives 600,000 men and women.

CHAPTER 4

Fevers from the Fabric: The Burning of Contaminated Clothing in the Epidemic of 1597-1602

By the late sixteenth century, the composite monarchies of Western Europe were standing at the precipice of economic and demographic collapse, a phenomenon which historians have referred to as the Crisis of the Seventeenth Century.⁴⁴⁶ A combination of factors such as poor harvests, incessant wars, disastrous economic policies, lower average temperatures, and epidemic diseases is frequently cited as the principal catalyst for the crisis.⁴⁴⁷ Even though towns and cities throughout Europe felt the effects of such forces, recent scholarship has steered away from any overarching claims about the nature and ramifications of this disaster.⁴⁴⁸ Rather, historians recognize that early modern governments at the regional and superregional level had to monitor and address the disorder and forms of stress in disparate forms. Thus, one should not conceptualize the Seventeenth Century Crisis as a singular, coherent event; rather, it was an amalgamation

⁴⁴⁶ The historiography on the general crisis of the seventeenth century is complex. Although these debates go back to Eric Hobsbawm and Trevor Roper, the historiography in recent decades has splintered off into numerous smaller debates, which examine the extent of this crisis in each state. The watershed article which brought this discussion to the fore was Eric Hobsbawm's, "The overall crisis of the European economy in the seventeenth century," *Past and Present* 5&6 (1954). For specific references to Spain, see *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*. Ed. Thompson, I.A.A. and Bartolomé Yun Casalilla.

⁴⁴⁷ Geoffrey Parker. "Introduction" to *Crisis of the Seventeenth century*

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.,

of a series of ecological and manmade catastrophes. While outbreaks of disease and famine are usually identified as the main drivers of demographic decline, ineffective, heavy-handed public health policies have often been overlooked as a factor that worsened existing crises. This chapter adds to this historiographical discussion by examining how failed public health policies implemented during the epidemic of 1597-1602 exacerbated already grim conditions in Avila. During the winter of 1599-1600, many residents of the city, most of whom were poor, died from failed public health policies – not from the pestilence.

When news of a new epidemic reached Avila in 1597, the city closed off all its gates, prevented outsiders from entering, and punished those who broke any plague-related ordinances, just as it had done in previous decades.⁴⁴⁹ These municipal reactions stymied economic activity by preventing much-needed supplies and sustenance from entering the city, which in turn further worsened already unstable conditions. For two years, Avila invested money on temporary fortifications and guards to prepare for the worst, but the epidemic stayed away, leading the city to eventually lower its guard in 1598.

When the epidemic finally did arrive late in 1599, the council of Avila – following royal mandates – ordered clothing and bedding from those who had contracted plague to be confiscated and burned. For approximately three months, teams of men

⁴⁴⁹ Multiple historians have observed similar events for other regions, most notably in the Italian city-states. See Ann G. Carmichael. *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Carlo Cipolla *Cristofano and the Plague*.

searched for those who had fallen ill or were suspected to have contracted plague. The agents of the city then confiscated all items worn or used by the *apestados*, and tossed the contaminated objects into bonfires to prevent the further spread of pestilence. As a direct result of this mandate, many men and women – most of whom were poor – roamed the streets without clothes or jackets. Forced to endure the bitter winter cold without proper shelter or coverings, men and women died because of the frigid conditions.

Residents of Avila thus had to worry not only about contracting and dying from plague, but also about suffering under the stringent health policies promulgated by the crown and carried out by city authorities. The new municipal ordinances, which were designed to curb the disaster, unfortunately had the opposite effect. Indeed, once the *regidores* realized that confiscating clothing in subzero temperatures was not the best approach to deal with pestilence, they begged the crown for assistance, demanding that new clothing and bedding be brought to replace the ones which had been burned. Despite such pleas, Philip III – who wanted to maintain the health and safety of his people and the republic – continued to follow the recommendations of university-trained licensed physicians and doctors, who advised the monarch that clothing was the critical intermediate vector of disease transmission. Thus, the medical experts from the Health Board in Madrid ignored the complaints from Avila, and argued the best course of action was to continue with policies of confiscation and destruction. For these officially-licensed, medical experts, attacking the source of the contagion and not deviating from the original objective was the key to successfully halting the spread of the pestilence.

Such public health policies were formulated based on theories of contagionism, which gained popularity in Spain in the second half of the sixteenth century. Before this revival of contagionism, late medieval European medical institutions had postulated that miasma was the principal cause of pestilence. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, contagionism gained appeal amongst medical communities in Spanish and Italian centers of learning. Contagion theories stated that inanimate vectors, such as clothing, furniture, buildings, and bedding, could absorb the venomous qualities of disease. Once the objects were contaminated, humans who touched these objects could become ill through prolonged exposure. These medical theories, which reached their apex of popularity in Spain during the outbreak of 1597-1602, played a profound role in shaping Madrid's approach to public health.

The first section of this chapter examines the emergence and dissemination of discourses of early modern contagionism in late sixteenth century Spain. It shows how these theories experienced a revival among medical experts in Spanish Rome by the mid-sixteenth century. By 1597, theories on contagionism were popular in Spain and gained acceptance in the highest centers of learning, which then became part of official public health policy. Thus, medical experts who tried to explain the causes of the outbreak of 1597-1602 relied heavily upon theories of contagionism in their explanations. The second section covers an intermediate period between 1597-1598 when the city council of Avila was preoccupied with building fences and organizing funds for the guards, despite the countless number of poor who were roaming the streets. Although the plague did not claim any victims during these years, the council of Avila's obsession with

preventing the entrance of foreigners blocked the flow of trade. In essence, fear of pestilence worsened conditions for the poor. The last section examines the winter of 1599-1600 when the plague entered Avila, and the council responded by ordering the burning of pestilential fabrics.

“The Maltese Whore”: Contagious Discourses

In the late second century, Galen hypothesized that certain illnesses could be transferred from infected to non-infected subjects through what he called the “seeds of disease” and “seeds of plague.”⁴⁵⁰ According to this theory, if the seeds from an ill person were inadvertently deposited onto an inanimate object, a healthy individual who touched that object could then become sick. Furthermore, these seeds could also be directly transmitted from person to person without an intermediate vector. This theory is, arguably, one of the earliest descriptions of contagion that exists in the canon of Western medicine. Even though Galen’s beliefs bear little semblance to modern understandings of contagion, his “seeds of disease” have been recognized as an ancient precursor to modern germ theory.

When analyzing his writings on the “seeds of disease” in the context of his complete list of works, however, we see that Galen actually “devoted little attention to

⁴⁵⁰ See Galen, *On Initial Causes. De Causis proctaracticis. Origins of Contagion*. For a general overview on his approach to medicine, see Mark Grant, *Galen on Food and Diet* (London: Routledge, 2000).

these seeds,” focusing instead, like his predecessor Hippocrates, on humoral equilibrium through a well-maintained diet to prevent the onset of fevers and other symptoms.⁴⁵¹

One possible reason why this theory never gained traction was because it was diametrically opposed to Galen’s own approach to medical philosophy: searching for causes and remedies through observation and documentation. Since Galen and his disciples were unable to observe, touch, or examine these “seeds of disease,” the theory, strictly speaking, remained in the realm of speculation. From late antiquity to the Renaissance, medical experts made relatively few references to Galenic contagion, emphasizing the importance of humoral balance instead.⁴⁵² For over a thousand years Galen’s theories on “seeds of disease,” for the most part, remained a footnote in medical history – until the sixteenth century.

A renewed interest on contagionism emerged around the mid-sixteenth century, rekindling curiosity and sparking debates among Italian intellectuals.⁴⁵³ A central figure

⁴⁵¹ See Vivian Nutton, “The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance,” In *Medical History* 27 (1983):15.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 20-21. Nutton has pointed out two primary exceptions to this statement. Isadore of Seville *On the Nature of Things* and Tommaso del Garbo *Commentaria non parum utilia in libros Galeni* elaborate, briefly, on Galen’s theories of “plague-bearing seeds.”

⁴⁵³ While most historians contend that theories of contagionism gained popularity in the sixteenth century, others, such as Ann Carmichael, have argued that debates concerning “political and intellectual debates about contagion-based plague control” took place among Milanese intellectuals in the mid-fifteenth century. These earlier debates, in my view, were important precursors to sixteenth century debates on contagionism. See Ann G. Carmichael, “Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 44 (1991): 214.

in this revival was Girolamo Fracastoro, an Italian polymath and physician. He and his contemporaries downplayed the causative agency of the movement of planets and stars – ideas which were popular among Italian public health officials and theorists during the medical Renaissance.⁴⁵⁴ In its place they suggested that poisonous atmospheric vapors could contaminate living and non-living things. Animals, walls, buildings, bedding and clothes – particularly those made of wool – could become “corrupted” under certain atmospheric conditions.⁴⁵⁵ The contaminated objects were the carriers of the “seeds of disease,” which could then be transmitted to humans, unless properly disinfected through careful washing, perfuming, airing out or heat treatment.⁴⁵⁶

Early twentieth century historians of medicine often cite Fracastoro as one of the first scholars to expound a working theoretical model on contagionism, which, according to these historians, was an early precursor to modern germ theory.⁴⁵⁷ More recent

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 253-254.

⁴⁵⁵ Vivian Nutton, “The seeds of Disease,” 25.

⁴⁵⁶ It is not clear how poisonous vapors generate “seeds of disease.” Scholars have struggled to properly trace and explain the logic behind these theories since their presuppositions are not always clear.

⁴⁵⁷ Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and early Renaissance Medicine*, 129-130; Vivian Nutton, “The Reception of Fracastoro’s Theory of Contagion: The Seed that Fell among Thorns?” *Osiris*, Vol. 6, *Renaissance Medical Learning: Evolution of Tradition* (1990), 196-234. Taken from Nutton’s footnote on Fracastoro. F. H. Garrison, ‘Fracastorius, Athanasius Kircher and the germ theory of disease’, *Science*, 1910, 31: 500; idem, *An introduction to the history of medicine*, 4th ed., Philadelphia and London, W. B. Saunders, 1929, p. 233; A. Castiglioni, *A history of medicine*, 2nd ed., New York, A. A. Knopf, 1947, p. 457.

scholarship, however, has challenged such adulatory, teleological interpretations, arguing instead that Fracastoro's treatises were an amalgamation of pre-existing beliefs on disease and other models of contagion.⁴⁵⁸ According to a new generation of historians of medicine, Fracastoro and his disciples were not revolutionaries; rather, they fused older theories of miasma with ideas of contagion, creating a unique, synthesized early modern view of contagion.⁴⁵⁹ Traditional narratives of Fracastoro's contributions to modern medicine are often exaggerated and lack sufficient evidence. Nevertheless, the publication of Fracastoro's seminal work *De Contagione et Contagiosis Morbis* in 1546, marked a turning point on the scholarly discourses of contagionism.

As early modern physicians constructed new theoretical models on contagionism in Italian centers of learning, Spanish intellectuals, driven by curiosity and a pursuit to study the most cutting-edge medical theories of the time, worked closely with their Italian counterparts to acquire as much knowledge as they could, particularly in Rome.⁴⁶⁰ Distinguished Spanish scholars and physicians such as Juan Paez de Castro, Juan Aguilera, and Andres Laguna lived and studied in Spanish Rome, where they "assisted in

⁴⁵⁸ Vivian Nutton, "The Reception of Fracastoro's Theory," 196.

⁴⁵⁹ Annemarie Kinzelbach, "Infection, Contagion, and Public Health in Late medieval and Early Modern German Imperial Towns," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 61 (2006), 369-389.

⁴⁶⁰ See Thomas Dandeleit's *Spanish Rome: 1500-1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

the formation of a renewed Spanish medical culture.”⁴⁶¹ Their drive for acquiring as much knowledge as possible in the Italy of Charles V, as argued by Elisa Andretta, “shaped intellectual life on the Iberian peninsula” as well.⁴⁶² The medical cultures of the Spanish Mediterranean openly communicated, shared, and borrowed from one another to disseminate newly emerging explanations on disease.⁴⁶³ As it will be discussed in the last section, these medical discourses on contagionism shaped municipal responses to epidemics, including Avila.

By the 1560s, medical theories on the “seeds of disease” appeared in treatises which were printed and circulated throughout the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁶⁴ One of the best known treatises from this era was Juan Thomas Porcell’s *Información curación de la peste de Caragoca y Praeservación contra Peste en General*. Porcell in his magnum opus outlined the procedures and justifications for the five autopsies he conducted in

⁴⁶¹ Andretta, Elisa. “The Medical Cultures of “the Spaniards of Italy”: Scientific Communication, Learned Practices, and Medicine in the Correspondence of Juan Paez de Castro (1545-1552)” in *Medical Cultures of the Early Modern Spanish Empire*, ed. by John Slater (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 144-145.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁶³ *Medical Cultures of the Spanish Empire*, ed. by John Slater.

⁴⁶⁴ Since the Enlightenment, scholars have ignored or dismissed the contributions of the scientific communities of early modern Spain. Spain, according to many eighteenth-century intellectuals, was the villain that disrupted the progress of modern sciences. In recent years, however, historians of Spain have challenged these false narratives. See Víctor Navarro Brotóns and William Eamon, eds. *Beyond the Black Legend: Spain and the Scientific Revolution* (Valencia: Insitituo de Historia de la Ciencia d Documentación López Piñero, 2007).

Zaragoza, which was the first pathological study of plague victims.⁴⁶⁵ Although Porcell is often considered to be part of the intellectual tradition of Vesalius (learning and teaching through observation and demonstration),⁴⁶⁶ less empirically based theories on contagion form the foundation for the preventative measures he offered his lay and professional audience.

Following the intellectual trends of the time, Porcell considered dirty clothing to be one of the vectors for disease transmission. He postulated that some harmful substances “are near us and touch us.”⁴⁶⁷ “We ourselves,” he added, “can carry these venomous things” with us.⁴⁶⁸ As a remedy, he advised his readers to make a concerted effort to always “dress themselves with clean clothes, and for those who can afford to do so, change their shirts every day.”⁴⁶⁹ In addition, those who had the financial means, should “fumigate and perfume their shirts” with special “powders” to rid the fabric of any venomous substances and noxious scents.⁴⁷⁰ For those who could not afford such powders, they should use “roses, flowers of oranges, lemons and citrons” and “all things

⁴⁶⁵ Bjørn Okholm Skaarup, *Anatomy and Anatomists in Early Modern Spain*. (Abington: Routledge, 2016), 29.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 170-173.

⁴⁶⁷ Porcell, *Información y curación de la peste de çargoça*, 108.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

of good smell” for protection from harmful contamination.⁴⁷¹ These recommendations, which came from a highly respected member of the medical community, focused on malodorous clothing as a vector for disease transmission, ideas which in turn influenced the theories of his colleagues and contemporaries. These theories gained recognition and acceptance in the Spanish epidemic 1597-1602.

By the time the epidemic struck Seville in 1597, local medical experts were already relying upon concepts and technical terms from their Italian and Castilian counterparts to better define and make sense of the epidemic that was afflicting the city.⁴⁷² New medical curiosity led theorists to begin reassessing the causes of pestilence, which in turn led to a rapid surge in the number of published medical tracts on plague and disease transmission. As the epidemic swept through the peninsula, Spanish doctors and physicians published a total of thirty-nine treatises on plague, with eleven of those works coming directly from Seville.⁴⁷³ The sudden upsurge of published plague treatises from 1597-1602 was a direct result of the panic and frustration that consumed the Spanish medical community, since the epidemic was spreading unchecked.⁴⁷⁴ The technical

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Evidence from an epidemic in Seville in the early 1580s suggest that theories of contagionism had already been present. Municipal officials in 1581 demanded that all the clothing and bedding of those who may have been infected should be burned. See Cook, *The Plague Files*, 113.

⁴⁷³ Bowers, *Plague and Public Health*, 94-95.

⁴⁷⁴ The geographical extent of this epidemic was remarkable, reaching Dunkirk in Flanders, Normandy, the Catabrian coast, la Rioja, Portugal, and Andalusia, all of which

language that the experts used in these published works, significantly, echoed earlier Italian medical discourses on contagionism. A careful examination of plague treatises published between 1597-1603 reveals that contagionism was one of the central theoretical model used to explain the origins of the epidemic and shape public health policies.

As doctors in Seville searched for explanations for the origins of the epidemic, some of them surmised that infected men, women, or objects were likely the chief culprits that spread the disease. Medical tracts – which were being printed en masse at the request of Philip II, his son Philip III and his closest advisors – attempted to pinpoint where and how the epidemic had begun.⁴⁷⁵ These information these tracts contain provides us with some important insights and clues on the inner workings and theoretical frameworks from which these doctors and physicians worked. One of the best examples of this is Miguel Martinez’s *Remedios Preservativos y Curativos, Para en Tiempo de la Peste* (1597), which speculates that the plague arrived in Seville through a band of infected soldiers and foreigners. With a sense of urgency and fear, Martinez wrote about the causes and cures for this outbreak from the safety of a small town just outside Seville. He wrote at this location because he feared that “there is nothing in the world that is able

referenced the plague outbreaks. Pérez Moreda, *crisis de mortalidad* 34-35; Also see Bartolomé Bennessar, *Recherches sur les grandes épidémies*

⁴⁷⁵ Like many early modern epidemics, pinpointing the actual point of origin of the pestilence is virtually impossible without the aid of paleopathological research.

to destroy cities with such great power and quickness as the plague.”⁴⁷⁶ Even though he was not in Seville as these events occurred, his writings provide us with a glimpse into the medical and social stereotypes that were prevalent at the turn of the century.

Martinez blamed the outbreak in Seville on infected foreigners who were travelling through the city, a tactic which seems to be the case with many outbreaks throughout history. The true genesis of the 1597 epidemic, Martinez asserted, “came to our city of Seville from outside by way of the sea.”⁴⁷⁷ Martinez recounted that an infected woman, “known as the Maltese whore in Italy,” had carnal relations with a captain of a galley. Martinez lamented that this “captain went to sleep, for lack of a better term, with a Maltese whore,” which triggered a series of unfortunate events.⁴⁷⁸

After his interaction with the Maltese prostitute, the captain suddenly fell ill, which in turn spurred an eruption of reported illnesses among his crew. These men, according to Martinez, “introduced the contagion to Palermo in Sicily.”⁴⁷⁹ Afterwards, this sick group of men, who were primarily “blacks and soldiers,” unknowingly brought the disease over to Seville. Speaking from his own experiences, Martinez noted that “we see the soldiers and blacks walking through the streets who are sick,” and “without

⁴⁷⁶ Miguel Martinez de Leyua, *Remedios Preservativos y curativos, para en tiempo de la peste: y otras curiosas experiencias* (Madrid, 1597), B4 Prologue.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 65a.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

warning they are able to infect the city with their illness.”⁴⁸⁰ Although additional archival research in Seville would be required to investigate any of his claims, Martinez’s narrative is an important illustration of how medical experts interpreted methods of contraction and the means of spreading the disease. Martinez recognized that most outbreaks of plague could have myriad sources: “It could come from the air, vapors, dead bodies, lakes, caverns etc.”⁴⁸¹ For this epidemic, however, he postulated that it was the fabrics worn by foreigners which “were able to contaminate the city,” and that “their clothes that they washed and left” in the open had polluted Seville and its water supply, bringing destruction and ruin.⁴⁸²

The language Martinez utilized in his treatise offers two important insights onto his philosophies of contagion. First, he states that the foreigners “*podían contagiar*” (“[they] were able to infect”). Using the active voice, the syntax suggests that the individuals were the agents who infected the city. Rather than claiming that miasma, filth, stale water et al. were the chief culprits, the contagion came from foreign lands through infected bodies and contaminated clothes. A second linguistic point is that he used the word *contagiar*, which normally means “to infect” in both Spanish and Latin. The Spanish verb *contagiar* derives from the Latin verb *tangere*, which literally means

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 65a.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

“to touch” or “to put one’s hands on.”⁴⁸³ Thus, both the concept and the etymology behind of the word suggests an intentional, willful act of touching to transfer disease.

Most importantly, Martinez used the word “seeds” to better illustrate for his audience what the soldiers and blacks were carrying with them to infect others. Martinez described, “the quantity of very sick blacks who were able to bring the *seed*.”⁴⁸⁴ These seeds were sown, figuratively speaking, and bore fruit that was “so pestilential.”⁴⁸⁵ What was unique is that these seeds seem to have been planted in the fabric as well as on the body. For example, Martinez recounted that “numerous very sick blacks” had the seeds of disease with them on their “black bodies.”⁴⁸⁶ In addition, “foreign clothes” could also carry, transfer, and plant the seeds.⁴⁸⁷ These inanimate objects could be corrupted, he suggested, and therefore had to be handled with caution.⁴⁸⁸ Since these fabrics were potentially hazardous materials, the clothes needed to be burned in order to completely eradicate the seedbed of disease. Martinez’s explanation and use of the word

⁴⁸³ *Oxford Latin Desk Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. “tangō.”

⁴⁸⁴ Martinez de Leyua, *Remedios Preservativos y curativos*, 46. My emphasis added.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ “cantidad de negros muy enfermos que pudieron traer la semilla en sus negros costales: y sembrarla y coger el fruto que todos hemos visto tan pestilencial,” *Ibid.*, 46; *Real Academia Española*, s.v. “costal” March 31, 2017, www.rae.es.

⁴⁸⁷ Martinez de Leyua, *Remedios Preservativos y curativos*, 46.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

seed, in this context, operated as a key discursive marker that harkens back to Galen's "seeds of disease."

Martinez's narrative of the pestilence in Seville illustrates how bodies and fabrics could transfer seeds of plague from one locality to another; however, this theory appears to gain widespread acceptance in Spain only in the late-sixteenth century.⁴⁸⁹ Experts had investigated and debated the theory of contagionism since the dawn of the medical renaissance; however, the main problem with this explanation was that plague seemed to inexplicably infect those who had not been in contact with the sick at all. For example, monarchs and nobles who kept a safe distance from diseased bodies could suddenly become ill. On the other hand, surgeons, physicians, priests and members of health boards who visited and cared for the infected, in many instances, did not become ill, indicating to most Spaniards that plague was not spread through human-to-human contact. Despite centuries of empirical observations on the etiologies of plague, nevertheless contagionism quickly gained momentum as a viable explanation on the spreading of pestilence in late sixteenth century Iberia. This, however, does not mean that a complete revolution in medical knowledge took place where contagionism replaced miasma. Rather, theories of contagionism and miasma coexisted in the sixteenth century,

⁴⁸⁹ As mentioned previously, Ann Carmichael highlighted examples from fifteenth century Milan, evidence which suggests that public health officials debated and negotiated the etiologies of plague since a unanimous consensus could not be reached. These theories and debates do not appear to be addressed in Spain until the late sixteenth century. See Carmichael, "Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan."

and some doctors synthesized the basic tenets of each theory to formulate their own unique, syncretic version of miasmatic-contagionism.

One such physician was Antonio Pérez, who wrote about the 1597 outbreak in Madrid.⁴⁹⁰ Pérez declared that the true plague emerges only when there is “corruption of the air.”⁴⁹¹ To detoxify this corruption, “burning pleasant smelling, aromatic substances in rooms, homes, streets and plazas, which purify the air,” was necessary.⁴⁹² Moreover, men should be “very cautious when cleaning the streets and plazas” since they could fall ill from the harmful fumes they breathed in.⁴⁹³ At its core, Pérez’s theory explains the origins of plague through miasma. However, Pérez took his theory a step further and postulated that the corrupted air could contaminate clothing, homes, and other inanimate objects. Pérez warned his readers – just like Martinez did for those living in Seville – that clothes which “appear to have been near harmful things, principally those who may be dying, should be burned.”⁴⁹⁴ For those who might have already died from plague, he advised, “the corrupted clothes are to be interred with the dead in their graves.”⁴⁹⁵ Pérez

⁴⁹⁰ This Antonio Pérez (*medico*) should not be confused with the more well-known Antonio Pérez (1540-1611), who was a courtier under Philip II and fled to France because of political conflicts.

⁴⁹¹ Antonio Pérez, *Breve tratado de peste, con sus causas, señales, y curación: y de lo que al presente corre en esta villa de Madrid* (Madrid, 1598), 1.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 10

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

postulated that both harmful airs and contaminated clothing could infect people; however, for Pérez, knowing the root cause of the pestilence was only one part of the equation. It was the task of public health officials to effectively implement correct policies so that illness would not spread.

In Pérez's view, hospitals and institutions of public health were falling short of his expectations. Writing about his experiences in a hospital in Madrid during the pestilence of 1597, Pérez lamented that "the abject poor are the ones who come to be cured."⁴⁹⁶ The poor men and women came with "very little clothes, which are dirty."⁴⁹⁷ The hospital, sadly, did not have much to offer those who were in need. Space was lacking, and the rooms that were available were "very small, and beds joined together – some two by two," which allowed illnesses to transfer quickly from person to person.⁴⁹⁸ Such cramped quarters worsened conditions for patients.⁴⁹⁹ Desiring a remedy for the lack of provisions and resources, Pérez drafted a special message for the *corregidor*. He cited his experience working in the hospitals and provided suggestions to improve upon the conditions that he had seen.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 28.

Witnessing the failures of Madrid's public health policies, Pérez made a formal list of suggestions to the *corregidor* in 1597. For the benefit of the sick, it was necessary to "buy and give shirts" to those in need "so that they can change their shirts and sheets every eight days."⁵⁰¹ Once clothing and bedding was changed, the dirty fabrics needed to be washed with "soap in running water" to properly decontaminate them. After being washed, they had to be "hung in the sun."⁵⁰² As for the bodies of those who did not survive, they should be "buried in underground graves" so that "there are no vapors" which could discharge from their bodies. In a similar manner, "dogs, cats, horses must be buried, not thrown outside or in the river."⁵⁰³ Following in the intellectual tradition of Fracastaro and Martinez, it was fabrics and deadly vapors that were the vectors of disease.

By 1597, the public health officials in Madrid knew that the poor in Madrid needed clothes, especially since Pérez made pleas to the *corregidor*. These Madrid experiences, as will be shown below, had a profound influence in shaping the municipal and cathedral policies concerning plague in Avila. The power of these ideas, unfortunately, led to the deaths many poor in Avila, since their clothes were stripped away to be burned.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 30.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

Funding for the Fences; Privation for the Poor (1597-1598)

As the plague made its way into Castile,⁵⁰⁴ Avila received news of its arrival in late 1597, which prompted city officials to begin traditional measures for isolating the city and removing any harmful substances that might spawn miasma, such as garbage and sources of stale water. Even though the city prepared for the worst-case scenario, plague did not claim any from 1597-1598. Nevertheless, fear of the pestilence triggered a series of municipal reactions, and it is these responses which will be the focal point of analysis in this section. Two main points will be established. First, even though funds were scarce because of the ongoing Castilian Crisis, the local government in Avila continued to allocate funds for the *guarda de peste*. Second, the economic disaster increased the number of poor in Avila who needed basic sustenance and support, but despite the urgent and growing need for poor relief measures, the preoccupation with the *Guarda de Peste* took precedence over other forms of charity.

On Saturday, 13 September, 1597, a meeting was called at the council to allocate funds for setting up a system to block the entrance of all foreigners – especially those who came from regions afflicted by pestilence. One of the first commands was to free up enough money to construct a temporary wall to prevent contagious bodies and goods from entering, and to protect those residents who lived directly outside of the main city

⁵⁰⁴ Although word of the epidemic reached Madrid in 1597, mortality rates from plague remained relatively low until 1599. See Pérez Moreda, “The plague in Castile at the end of the sixteenth century and its consequences.”

walls.⁵⁰⁵ The purpose of the fence was to separate Avila from the rest of the province, and to that end, the council ordered men to keep watch over the city's openings, side entrances, and weak points.⁵⁰⁶ As it had decades before, the city isolated itself from its neighboring towns and villages, which obstructed the normal flow of traffic and trade in and out of the city.

As was customary in most parts of the western Mediterranean,⁵⁰⁷ Avila also established a *junta de peste*, or the committee of Plague – a group of noblemen charged with presiding over matters related to the outbreak. The primary task of this *ad hoc* committee was to manage policies of isolation, arrange payments for guards, oversee the construction of temporary fortifications, monitor the effectiveness of the fences, investigate any potential vectors of infection, and consult medical experts, both local and regional, to handle outbreaks in accordance with the most up-to-date theories of the time. While the local Church operated and financed the hospitals primarily through donations to offer treatments for the sick and poor, the *junta de peste* was a provisional secular institution whose authority and power dissolved as soon as the outbreak ceased.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ The dimensions and materials used for the construction of this fence are not mentioned in any the records I have consulted, but given that the *abulenses* have erected this fence in previous outbreaks, one can safely surmise that it did a sufficient job, in the past, of preventing any unauthorized entrance. AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 104a.

⁵⁰⁶ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 103B.

⁵⁰⁷ Many Italian city-states establish similar health boards. See Ann G. Carmichael *Plague and the Poor*; Carlo Cipolla, *Cristofano and the Plague*. For London, see

⁵⁰⁸ Municipalities in other parts of Spain, such as Seville, formed similar *juntas* to deal with the epidemic. See Bowers, *Public Health*; Cooks, *Plague Files*.

After the *regidores* and *junta de peste* organized the first set of emergency responses, the noblemen established an official date to block all unauthorized entrance into the city. On 16 September, the council of Avila reached an agreement that on the following Sunday at noon, the guarding of the city, all its ancient gates, and the temporary fortification would begin.⁵⁰⁹ “Each *regidor* and all *caballeros* and *hidalgos*” made a special request to all the residents. They ordered that “two citizens” – who had been specially appointed by the *procurador* – would stand vigilant at these passageways to obstruct the entrance of any unwanted outsiders.⁵¹⁰ Recruiting and mobilizing commoners as security personnel to protect the city against dangerous illnesses was a cost-effective approach. Once the men were designated to watch “each gate” to the city, the consistory delegated other responsibilities and compensated all those who worked temporarily on behalf of Avila.

Once security forces were summoned, Juan Lopez, the official public herald, proclaimed at all the “plazas and public parts where all the neighbors of this city congregate” the new commands expounded by the council.⁵¹¹ The first order of business was to let the public know that those living near the newly constructed barriers must be observant and always on the ready, lest foreigners attempt to pass through. The homes

⁵⁰⁹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 104a.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 106a.

near the fences, which “have side entrances and shutters” or access points to the “fields outside” had to be guarded with extra caution, and the owners of such homes should always remain alert for would-be intruders.⁵¹² To add to this point, Lopez proclaimed to the city, “They [outsiders] are not allowed to enter through them [the gates].” Scaling the walls was also strictly prohibited for anyone: “No person may climb nor enter through the walls which are newly made.”⁵¹³ These ordinances were not to be taken lightly, since the punishment for each offense was “100 lashes for those who come from a lower status.”⁵¹⁴ As in decades before, disrupting security or unlawfully entering Avila without permission during an epidemic was a serious crime. The punishment was severe, which, demonstrates just how serious the moment was. The council made sure that everyone in the city knew of these rules and did all that was necessary to block the access of any non-residents.

Although the ordinances sought to hermetically seal off the city, some exceptions were made for special access into Avila. For the most part, anyone not originally from Avila was blocked from entering unless the outsider provided testimony to a guard at the gate. On 14 September, the council commanded “to all the caballeros that are at the roads and gates” to protect it “with much caution” so that “no person may enter from

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.,105b.

outside.”⁵¹⁵ The council then specified that only those who gave proper testimony might enter the city.⁵¹⁶ The type of testimony required to pass through the city is not mentioned in the records; however, it is likely that the canons and noblemen who were absent during the pestilence and wished to return were allowed access. Given that these men – along with royal couriers – had to travel from town to town during outbreaks, they may have had special access and permission to enter Avila.

Coupled with the enclosure of the city, pigsties, that were located near the convents had to be cleaned or removed. Although the *junta de peste* did not determine the root causes of the pestilence, ordering filthy areas to be sanitized was part of the general precautionary measures that had been traditional since the fifteenth century. To have these areas decontaminated, the consistory set aside “one-hundred forty *reales* to clean the pigsty located near the gate of Gil Gonzalez.” Located three hundred meters away from the cathedral on the eastern side of the main walls, the convent of Gil Gonzalez stood as a cultural and religious nexus of Avila – an area where religious ceremonies, Corpus Christi processions, and civic gatherings took place. Protecting and cleaning this area for the health of the city was of major importance, since human traffic crossed at the location.

Despite the general instability of the Castilian economy, the council of Avila reached deep into its pockets and did whatever necessary to rid the barrios of filth.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 133a.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ See *The Castillian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*.

After long deliberation, the councilors agreed to provide an additional “four-hundred *reales* for the cleaning of the pigsty at the gate.”⁵¹⁸ Additional pigsties throughout the city also required a thorough washing. On 23 September, it was decided to free up one-hundred forty *reales* for Agustin Gonzalez “to clean the pigsties next to the old gate of San Francisco” – which was another monastery located in a densely-populated district. That same time, Don Juan Serrano was sent out to observe the cleaning of “the pigsty next to the porter’s office of charity of Santa Catalina, which is directly adjacent to the monastery of San Francisco.”⁵¹⁹ Even before a cause was officially declared, the *regidores* relied upon their time-tested traditional approaches.

Setting aside funds to protect the city was a matter of life or death; therefore, the *regidores* were forced to acquire enough funds despite the on-going economic crisis. This epidemic occurred when finances were tight and basic sustenance in low supply. Ample evidence from municipal, cathedral, and provincial records, particularly for the late sixteenth century, demonstrate the strain on the local and regional economy. Mentioned frequently in these records are the poor, homeless, and those in need. Although it wasn’t a top priority, the seemingly endless number of poor and needy throughout the streets grabbed the attention of the council.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 106a.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 110B.

⁵²⁰ See the *Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*. See Ruth Mackey *Lazy and Improvident People* which discusses some of the cultural aspects of living in poverty in

Indeed, more than in earlier sixteenth century outbreaks, the 1597-1603 epidemic came at a time when levels of poverty and economic stagnation were at an all-time high for Castile and other regions in Spain.⁵²¹ The responsibility to care for those who were sick and poor fell into the hands of the Church and its auxiliary institutions. However, the onset of the seventeenth century crisis also stretched the resources of the ecclesiastical institutions in Avila, limiting their ability to help those in need. This fact is apparent from the meeting on 22 September, 1597, when the city begged the local bishop for poor relief assistance during the epidemic.⁵²² The documents do not provide any estimates on the number of poor or homeless, but they do stress the seeming omnipresence of the poor in the refuges and the hospitals. Many of the patients visiting hospitals seeking help did not have access to food or proper clothing. As these men, women, and children flooded the hospitals, it became apparent to the hospital personnel that patients were not necessarily ill, but rather seeking basic sustenance. Don Pedro del Peso de Vera and Francisco de Sorio, on behalf of the city, tried “to communicate with

Seventeenth century Spain. The picaresque novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* also provides vivid details of difficult conditions in Castile.

⁵²¹ This is far from an exhaustive list. A few key works are Mercedes Lázaro Ruiz, *Las Crisis de Mortalidad de La Rioja*, For Castile *The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* eds. Pérez Moreda, Vicente, *Las crisis de mortalidad*; For Ciudad Real, see Carla Rahn Phillips, who suggests that the plague “could have spread inland from Seville,” but the evidence is lacking to establish such a claim, pg 28. Harvest failures, however, did disrupt the economy, and the population of Ciudad Real did slump during this period. See “Population: Structure and Trends” in *Ciudad Real, 1500-1750*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) pp. 17-48

⁵²² AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 109a.

the bishop giving accounts so that he can provide what he can for the treatment of the poor.”⁵²³ Aware that the church was also overwhelmed, the *corregidor* – under the direction of Philip II – publicly ordered that residents should give whatever aid they could to the poor.⁵²⁴ The lack of trade due to the isolationist policies of the council exacerbated the crisis, since it prevented goods from entering the city, which elevated food prices and made sustenance even less available.⁵²⁵

Even though poor relief was much needed, the council of Avila continued to allocate a sizeable portion of the city’s funds for the *guarda de peste*. On Tuesday 14 September, 1597, Martin Sanchez, a resident of Avila, was entrusted to “close the city because of the *peste*.”⁵²⁶ His objective was to assure that the city “is guarded from all parts.”⁵²⁷ For his services, the council set aside 26,248 *maravedís*, a portion which was given to Sanchez and the rest to other men. The following week, an additional two-

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Serafín Tapia highlights that the price of meat increased in the early months of 1600. Moreover, firewood was lacking because of the harsh weather and isolation. As a consequence, residents were unable to bake bread in January and February of 1600. Such arduous conditions aggravated the effects of the pestilence. See “Las Fuentes Demográficas,” 76.

⁵²⁶ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 111B.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

hundred *reales*⁵²⁸ was allocated so that “neighbors” can “guard for the pestilence.”⁵²⁹ Security forces were essential to achieve complete isolation, but maintenance for the makeshift fence was also required. For that end, one-hundred *reales* for repairs on the “two gates of Santa Ana and the Streets of the Moors” was set aside.⁵³⁰ For the last quarter of 1597, the council made a series of payments to maintain the *guarda de peste*. Even though the city knew full well that poverty-stricken men and women needed basic sustenance, the city’s priority was the pestilence.

While the men worked around the clock to guard and maintain the walls, the *junta de peste* sent out teams of men to inspect potentially plague-infested homes. On 14 September, Luis Pacheco, a member of the *junta de peste*, went “with the commission of this city to see the house which might be dangerous.”⁵³¹ What Pacheco looked for or found is uncertain, since the records make no additional reference to this inspection. He may have searched for sick individuals, or those who may have symptoms and marks of

⁵²⁸ In sixteenth century Spain, three forms of currency were in use – the *maravedí*, the *real*, and the *escudo*. Although the value of these coins fluctuated considerably under the Habsburgs, one *real* was approximately thirty-four *maravadi* in this period. See Akira Motomura, “The Best and Worst of Currencies: Seigniorage and Currency Policy in Spain, 1597-1650” *Journal of Economic History* 54 (1994): 106; Carlo Cipolla, *Money, Prices, and Civilization in the Mediterranean World: fifth to seventeenth century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956)

⁵²⁹ Libro 24 Fol. 111B

⁵³⁰ Libro 24 Fol 111a.

⁵³¹ Libro 24 Fol 133a.

bubonic plague. The *junta de peste* made concerted efforts to search for and investigate all potentially plague-inducing substances and sources.

For over three months in 1597, Avila kept its gates closed, and fortunately, pestilence never arrived; other areas throughout Spain, however, were still suffering.⁵³² In early December, the council of Avila received news that “there are so many who have been informed that the pestilence is [still] not ceasing.”⁵³³ One area that was still suffering was Madrid, which continued to be “guarded with much caution.”⁵³⁴ Although there were no reported cases of plague in Avila, the *regidores* still feared that the pestilence afflicting Madrid could reach Avila. Their concerns intensified when residents began reporting that sections of the makeshift fence had collapsed from the brutal winter.⁵³⁵ Despite diligent efforts to block the entrance of outsiders, the broken-down barrier left several gaps in the fortifications.⁵³⁶ Unauthorized foreigners bypassed all other checkpoints and entered Avila through these unguarded gaps. Downtrodden by the news, the city council reported on 2 December that its objective to guard the city from

⁵³² For Madrid, see appendix to Pérez, *Breve tratado de peste*. For Seville, see Martínez, *remedios preservativos*.

⁵³³ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 138a.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 138b.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

foreigners were “not achieved.”⁵³⁷ All of the painstaking work which was put into the fortifications seemed to have been in vain.

To correct their failures, the council sought to fix the security breakdown in three ways. First, the council of Avila reiterated an existing ordinance: “they [foreigners] may not enter [the city] without testimony.”⁵³⁸ Second, they ordered the reconstruction of the fallen fences and for the full enclosure of Avila.⁵³⁹ Third, anyone who did not follow these orders was subject to one-hundred lashes.⁵⁴⁰ Although the *guarda de peste* had failed, the council reminded all residents of the older ordinances, repaired the broken barriers, and the residents of the severe consequences for not adhering to their directives.

To enhance the security even further, the council did something unprecedented: they utilized residents who lived near the fences as security forces. On 9 December, 1597, it was reported: “On this day, it was said and agreed jointly [...] that the guard against the plague should be proclaimed, and it is agreed once again that it should be preached publicly to the six neighbors [who reside] nearest to the side entrances [of the fences].”⁵⁴¹ On 24 January, 1598, the consistory decided, once again, to employ the

⁵³⁷ The literal word used here was “portillos,” which has numerous translations. It could be: opening, gap, side entrance, breach.

⁵³⁸ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 138.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 143.

assistance of any citizens to help with the security, except this time, they extended it to all residents, not just those who live near the fences.⁵⁴² All citizens were expected to make a small contribution in the isolation of the city. Even in April of 1599, they continued to guard the city, ordering the neighbors next to the wall to watch the fences.⁵⁴³ Through the help of average residents, the city was able to guard against the plague. Utilizing average citizens was more cost effective; however, finances were still tight and the city had to borrow funds to repair the fence: “the spending for this wall will come from loans from where the *corregidor* and commissary think fitting.”⁵⁴⁴ Borrowing money was one channel to pay for the fence, but the council still had to search for other sources of funds to cover the cost.

One of the most shocking things about how the city sought money to prepare for this outbreak was that they took funds from the Corpus Christi procession. In previous chapters, it was argued that the Corpus Christi procession – specifically with the host from *Santo Niño de la Guardia* – was used as a form of prayer and thanksgiving which bonded the city together during the plague outbreak of 1519. In 1597, however, such processions were not used directly to combat plague. The records note that, “They will also take from the account of the *sisa*, which is for the *fiestas del sacramento* this

⁵⁴² Ibid., 169a.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 223-225.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.

year.”⁵⁴⁵ They used these funds from the Corpus Christi procession “so that from today they may begin to close the city” and so that “it[the plague] may end with greater brevity which might be possible.”⁵⁴⁶ The fact that they took money from the annual Corpus Christi processions provides a valuable clue about the shift in mentalities and priorities in the late sixteenth century.⁵⁴⁷

Finally, after months of isolation, the council decided to recommence trade with its neighbors. By February, it appeared that the pestilence had not entered the city. The council therefore decided to loosen up some of its restrictions by allowing merchants to enter the city to conduct business. For example, on 10 February, 1598, it was agreed that “fresh fish” could be brought into the city.⁵⁴⁸ The only condition was that they could not come from places which were considered *apestados*. This shift in policy took place because the *regidores* recognized that the “city is lacking many supplies,” largely due to its recent self-isolation.⁵⁴⁹ Ordinances from 1597 that prevented people from entering the city were blocking necessary sustenance, which contributed to the overall low supply of food.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 138a.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ I wish I could say more on this topic. But unfortunately, there is only one line in the documents that mentions this act of taking money from the corpus Christi processions. Further research may yield more findings on this particular issue.

⁵⁴⁸ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 24, 180

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

Despite the lack of food and low supplies, the council still thought it was prudent to continue to use funds for the *guarda de peste* for three months, and supported the *guarda de peste* until 16 May, 1598.⁵⁵⁰ On 28 February, 1598, they council freed up three-hundred *ducados* to guard against the plague. Two months later, 5 May, 1598, the city agreed that lord Aguirre should give an account for all the costs of “the fences” and “what it costs to close the old gates of the city.”⁵⁵¹ Even though funds were limited, they still agreed to pay two *ducados* of salary to those who “summon the Caballeros.”⁵⁵² The city thus did all that was in its power to block the entrance of any possible contagion. By mid-1598, however, the council for plague met only occasionally to offer payments, since the emergency seemed to have waned. None of the documents reports any deaths from plague during these years.

Fire and Ice: Death from the Elements

As reports of pestilence were rippling through the towns and villages near Seville and the Atlantic Coast, Avila, which had been in a state of readiness over a two year period, did not suffer any fatalities. Thus, fear and urgency had dwindled by the fall of 1599. City life resumed its normal course, and references to the pestilence were virtually non-existent from 1598 to 1599. During this intermediary period, the *junta de peste* did

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 180-187B

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

not issue any new policies or advise the council on the status of public health. The silence in the records suggests that the committee was effectively defunct. Furthermore, since the pestilence had not caused any casualties, some members of the *junta de peste* took the liberty of an extended leave of absence from their position, which was common in this period. It was during their absence in late 1599 that the *junta de peste* reconvened in an emergency meeting.

When the committee was summoned on 17 November, 1599, concern and panic swept the council since the plague was coming and key members of the *junta* were absent, meaning important decisions could not be voted on nor ratified. The two individuals on leave were Doctors Don Joan Beltran and Lorenzo Chacon, who were also canons in the cathedral chapter. As the official representatives of the Church in the *junta de peste*, their absence meant that the church had no voice or vote on matters of public health. Fortunately, Lorenzo Chacon had already designated a replacement should an emergency arise. Prior to his departure, he had named Francisco de Salamanca to assist the *junta* as he attended to other matters outside of Avila. Don Joan Beltran, on the other hand, “had left to Madrid” without designating a replacement to serve on his behalf.⁵⁵³

To resolve this dilemma, the cathedral chapter held a special meeting in order to appoint a temporary replacement, so that the committee could hold meetings, discuss policies, and vote for ordinances. The canons elected Don Fernando Escobar “through

⁵⁵³ ACA, actas capitulares, Libro 33, 17 November, 1599

secret votes” as the new “governor of the *junta de peste*.”⁵⁵⁴ He would fill in the vacant office until Don Joan Beltran returned from Madrid. As the new – albeit temporary – representative and voice of the Church, Escobar’s task was to work “for the health and remedy of the poor of Avila.”⁵⁵⁵ For that end, he and his colleagues strategized to curb the pestilence. These plans, however, broke away from traditional tactics and procedures used in previous outbreaks.⁵⁵⁶ It is in this context, with a reassembled *junta*, that the local government began to organize a new set of procedures and policies for combating the epidemic.

This section explores new procedures to burn all fabrics that were worn and used by the *apestados*. I will argue that this was the most counter-productive and destructive public health policy of sixteenth century Avila. To support this view, I examine three topics: 1. The theories of Luis de Mercado, who was one of the most prolific medical experts in Spain and a staunch supporter of burning clothing to eliminate contagion. 2. The royal directives which demanded that the council in Avila verify that the clothes were being confiscated and destroyed. The *corregidor* – who was escorted by an assistant and specially appointed members of the *junta de peste* – attended these bonfires to assure

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., no number. See section *junta de peste*.

⁵⁵⁶ It is uncertain who was actually dying from plague, famine, or other epidemic diseases. Demographic studies of Avila and Castile show a substantial increase in mortality rates beginning in November. It is likely that a combination of factors were responsible for the death. See Tapia and Pérez Moreda for demographic studies on Avila and Castile, respectively.

that the King's requests were being fulfilled. 3. Complaints from the residents and *regidores*, which were, for the most part, ignored by the crown.

The new policies being implemented in Avila received inspiration and guidance from the theories of Luis de Mercado (1525-1611), who proclaimed the effectiveness of “only three remedies” when defending “the great republics” against the pestilence. In his 1599 treatise on pestilence, Mercado argues that “Gold, fire, and castigation” were the remedies which could liberate the republic from the pestilence. Without these three, “neither medicine” nor “their auxiliaries” had any sufficient or good effect.⁵⁵⁷ His introductory note to the reader outlines the fundamental characteristics of the tripartite remedy as follows: “Gold, offered for making repairs at no cost; Fire, for burning clothes and homes so that no trace [of them] remains; Public and great castigation, for those who may break the law and order, which is preached to them in defense and cure of the sick.”⁵⁵⁸ While gold and castigation were essential for carrying out public health policies, fire was the element which ultimately restored health since it destroyed the “seedbed” of disease. Incinerating fabrics, bedding, and other goods that the *apestados* had worn or used for an extended period of time would, in Mercado's theory, eliminate the most important vector for disease transmission. Even though Mercado offered multiple reasons and explanations for the cause and spread of the pestilence, his ultimate

⁵⁵⁷ Luis de Mercado, *Libro, en que se trata con claridad la naturaleza causas, prouiveia, y verdadera orden y modo de curar la enfermedad vulgar, y peste que en estos años se ha diuulgado por toda España* (Madrid: 1599), Section “Al Lector.”

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

aim was to provide a concise explanation “of the popular infirmity of plague which still is ongoing” at the moment. Published during the height of the epidemic in 1599, Mercado’s treatise reiterated existing medical terminology and hypotheses

Mercado’s theory, at first glance, appears to recapitulate sixteenth century theories on contagionism, but his interpretations and treatments for contagion differ from those of his colleagues in many ways. Whereas many of his contemporaries suggested that human-to-human touching was sufficient to transmit disease, Mercado argued that physical contact had to be constant and persistent for the illness to successfully transfer from person to person.⁵⁵⁹ In other words, uninterrupted and continual touching was an essential precondition for the illness to spread. While the body was a natural “seedbed” that could nurture pathogens, diseases could only be transferred from one person to another after prolonged contact. This emphasis on prolonged touching was an important departure from the theories of other prominent Spanish physicians, who postulated that sexual contact and interactions with infected foreigners had been sufficient to infect an entire crew of men. Mercado’s theory had a different approach. Clothing, bedding, and other objects that were in continuous contact with the *apestados* were the vectors that had to be destroyed, not foreigners or prostitutes.

A unique element of Mercado’s treatise was his zealous drive to eliminate all fabrics worn by the *apostesdos*. For theorists who sided with the school of contagionism, use of pleasant smelling herbs, fumigation, and washing were effective

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

ways to purge any harmful contaminants. In sharp contrast, while Mercado recognized the benefits of washing clothes to decontaminate the fabric, he insisted that burning was the most complete and thorough way to purge the contamination. Thus, when Mercado heard that some towns and villages “had not burned a single thread of clothing,” he deemed their behavior as irresponsible and damaging to the republic.⁵⁶⁰ The failure to properly burn clothing at the local level was a danger to all of those in the kingdom, and he maintained, therefore, all perpetrators should be subject to “public castigation.”⁵⁶¹ To maintain the health of the republic, all of its constituent parts had to do their role to prevent the dissemination of pathogens. Avila, however, was not one of the villages or towns that ignored commands from public health commissions in Madrid. Licensed medical professional in Avila were likely well-versed in Mercado’s theories, which were part of the official medical curricula of Spain.

A brief examination of Mercado’s biography reveals that he was one of the principal architects of medical knowledge in Spain, and quite arguably *the* authority on public health in the second half of the sixteenth century. As *Protomedico* and Philip II’s personal chamber physician, Mercado’s status in the medical community in Spain was unparalleled, and his theories on etiology and treatment spread throughout the kingdom through many channels. The most important of these was his direct influence on shaping the medical licensing program. All officially trained physicians had to pass an

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 149b.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

examination to practice their craft, and by the late sixteenth century, the theories that had to be memorized came from Mercado's treatises. A rigorous study of his work was therefore an essential prerequisite to practice medicine in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Spain. Michele Clouse cogently explains this importance:

Philip turned to his *protomédico*, Luis Mercado, to further address the deficiencies in training and knowledge. Philip directed Mercado to standardize medical and anatomical knowledge for the use of not only university-trained physicians and surgeons, but also empiric practitioners who learned their medical practice through less formal means [...] Aware of the limited literacy among this diverse group of medical practitioners, the king ordered Mercado to publish the instruction manual in Castilian in order to reach the broadest audience possible.⁵⁶²

Mercado's medical theories, then, were standardized and disseminated to students of medicine as part of the official curriculum. While it would be inaccurate to say that medical knowledge came from one single individual, no other figure at this time was as influential as Luis Mercado. When the pestilence began to afflict central Spain in 1597-1602, Avila implemented the royal directives from the health board in Madrid, whose experts had trained under the tutelage of Mercado.

As the council of Avila prepared its emergency response protocol in late 1599, the hospitals and *junta de peste* were in an unprepared state, lacking the proper organization for crisis management. Don Fernando Escobar, as the newly elected governor, drafted a scathing report on the dismal and disorganized state of the *Hospital de Dios Padre* and

⁵⁶² Michele Clouse, *Medicine, Government and Public Health in Philip II's Spain*, 105.

the *junta de peste*. In front of the canons of the cathedral chapter, he presented his findings on 28 December, 1599. The urgent matters “of the moment,” explained Escobar, were not being addressed or attended to by the *junta*.⁵⁶³ Adding to his critical report, he decried that even “if a sick person were” to visit the hospital to receive treatment, he “would not be cured.”⁵⁶⁴ Multiple rooms and the building itself were in horrendous condition and in desperate need of repair. The edifice was so decrepit that the “Hospital where the *apestados* are usually treated” was empty.⁵⁶⁵ In it “no sick person” could be found since it could not provide adequate shelter and protection from the elements.⁵⁶⁶ Recognizing the dilapidated state of the hospital, funding was set aside to renovate its rooms. Over the next two months, construction workers worked diligently to put the hospital in suitable working condition. Thus, immediately executing Mercado’s plans was not possible since the *junta de peste* and the hospitals were in such dilapidated condition.

As repairs commenced on 12 January, 1600, the college of clerics confidently declared that the worst of the epidemic had just passed, which likely brought a sigh of relief to the canons. Evoking a language and sentiment of gratitude for God’s blessings,

⁵⁶³ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, 28 December, 1599.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ A direct translation for “*apestados*” does not exist in English. Loosely, it can be translated as “those infected with plague.”

⁵⁶⁶ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, 28 December, 1599.

they declared that “through the mercy of God this city is now healthy.”⁵⁶⁷ The very day that the canons made this rosy declaration about the condition of the city, the council of Avila held its own meeting on the conditions of the City; their prognosis was the polar opposite.

Down the street from the cathedral, the council of Avila held an emergency meeting to discuss a new letter from the King concerning the pestilence. The main guard of the consistory was sent out at ten o’clock in the morning to assemble a special meeting for that day.⁵⁶⁸ He summoned all the caballeros and *regidores* who were in Avila gradually checked in one by one. Once all the men had arrived, Don Diego de Ribera said and proposed, “the clothes of the persons suspected of plague” should be burned.⁵⁶⁹ At two o’clock in the afternoon the *regidores* concluded that such procedures “may be a remedy,” as they all agreed to the suggestions put before them.⁵⁷⁰ As the council began its plans to confiscate and burn clothing, they also set up the traditional guard against plague. In stark contrast with the prognosis made among the canons, the *regidores* apparently felt that they had to redouble their efforts to alleviate the epidemic.

On 15 January, Saturday, the city agreed, following the recommendations of the *corregidor*, to place its guard “for the conservation of the health of the city,” just as it had

⁵⁶⁷ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, 12 enero 1600.

⁵⁶⁸ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 17.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

done on year earlier.⁵⁷¹ The caballeros protected the major crossroads and gates, just as they had done in all emergency situations since the late medieval period. Alongside the protection from the caballeros, the town criers announced at all the major corners of the city that sewage should not be dumped, and all filth and garbage near populated barrios was to be cleaned to prevent the proliferation of noxious fumes. In previous outbreaks in the sixteenth century, however, once a defensive position was established, the city council reiterated the ordinances of cleanliness and payment for the caballeros *ad nauseam*. Anyone who did not follow these ordinances was subjected to public lashings and was forced to pay a fine. What is fascinating about the records from late 1599 and early 1600 is that they remain silent on the *guarda de peste* once it was officially established. What caused this silence? It seems that a preoccupation with the ordinances to burn clothing overshadowed all other ongoing conversations and discussion in the city and cathedral records for the next three months.

Approximately one week after these initial defensive measures were put in place, a message from the council of Health in Madrid arrived at the *ayuntamiento*, outlining protocols for handling the pestilence. Doctor Lorenzo Chacón stood before the *regidores* and read the correspondence, which stated, “the plague is coming, and it is bringing much damage to this republic.”⁵⁷² To fix this catastrophe, “They command that the clothing of

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 18a.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 26

all those who are ill from the pest be collected and that it should be burned.”⁵⁷³ After the letter was read, the *ayuntamiento* agreed that “the communication that his majesty gave to this city” must be fulfilled. All their work was ultimately “in the service of our God and the well-being of the republic”; to safeguard Avila and the republic, “the clothes of those suspected of having contracted plague should be burned.”⁵⁷⁴ The council agreed to follow the public health strategies as outlined by the experts from Madrid. The acceptance of this protocol marked a significant shift in Avila’s approach to dealing with plague. Such a transition illustrates the dynamism of early modern public health policies of Avila and its ability to evolve and adapt to the most up-to-date medical theories.

At this juncture in the narrative, the records, sadly, provide few details how the clothing or bedding was confiscated, nor do they state what criteria or tests officials used to determine who was an *apestado*. Also unknown is what, if any, type of resistance and protest occurred as clothing and bedding were being taken away. Despite the absence of such details, all the records do state that clothes had eventually been confiscated and were thrown into fires. To verify that men would be “burning the clothes of the sick ones,” Philip’s III’s representative went to the bonfires to watch the clothes burn, joining men of the *junta de peste*.⁵⁷⁵ A group of commissioners also went to “accompany his majesty of

⁵⁷³ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, no number.

⁵⁷⁴ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 26

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

the said *corregidor* and the high major.”⁵⁷⁶ Upon arrival at the site, the men watched the “burning of an abundance of clothes.”⁵⁷⁷

This act of attending the burning might appear to be an example of a “continual and functional surveillance,” as theorized and articulated by Foucault, albeit in an imperfect form.⁵⁷⁸ “Continuous and functional surveillance” was, for Foucault, tied to disciplinary mechanisms of power, and in Avila, the type of surveillance conducted by the *corregidor* was an extension of royal power and a means to regulate public health. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Philip III’s authority and power was the same as the eighteenth century hierarchized surveillance that Foucault elaborates upon. While his theoretical framework bears some connection to what happened in Avila, sixteenth century Spanish royal authority was flawed and restricted in many ways.⁵⁷⁹ Still, it seems noteworthy how carefully the authorities in Avila monitored the destruction of contaminated objects, including the ones found in hospitals.

Indeed, all hospitals which had been treating victims of the pestilence also had to adhere to these measures, meaning that groups of men collected the sheets, mattresses, and gowns used or worn by the *apestados* in the hospitals. As the orders stated, “It was

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison System*. 176-177.

⁵⁷⁹ For a discussion on the limits of royal authority in Spain, see Ruth MacKay, *Limits of Royal Authority*.

necessary to gather up in the hospital [...] all the things which had been used to serve the sick” and toss them in the fire. As for the beds made “of wood,” they “were broken and buried” so that they might not cause harm to anyone else.⁵⁸⁰ Teams of men worked diligently to collect, confiscate, incinerate, and bury objects which the *apestados* had touched.

At exactly this time, men, women, and children began suddenly disappearing. Crowded streets, markets, plazas, and public spaces become empty spaces of silence and calm. After the swift implementation of the Madrid Health Board’s policies, notaries recorded that “it appeared to the commission that many of the sick have disappeared,” which suggests that people were either dying or fleeing.⁵⁸¹ It is unclear what this “disappearance” means precisely, but considerable evidence suggests that after the appropriation of pestilential fabrics, bedding, and other vectors of contagion, many of *apestados* were dying from exposure to the winter cold. Some members of the *junta de peste* were outraged by the new policies and began voicing their dissatisfaction about the catastrophe that burning the fabrics was causing. On Wednesday, 26 January, 1600, Doctor Chacon informed the cathedral chapter, “the people, *apestados*, who had been in this city” during the duration of the pestilence “were people bankrupt and so poor that if [men of the council] removed the clothes from them which they had, [the *apestados*]

⁵⁸⁰ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 26

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 28b

could not be covered, which was needed for them” to endure through the winter.⁵⁸² The disheartening and tragic report added that many *abulenses* were going to bed “naked.”⁵⁸³ Demoralized and downtrodden, the notary recorded, “there is no resolution, nothing.”⁵⁸⁴ Another possibility for the disappearance is that the *apestados* were fleeing or hid from the *junta de peste*, because they did not want their blankets and jackets stripped from them during the icy winter. Pathogens were causing distress and agony, but the protocols from Madrid evidently exacerbated conditions for the *apestados*, making a difficult situation even worse for the poor.

Soon after these reports of vanishings, however, voices of discontent about the policies surfaced among the nobility of Avila. The men who had once trusted the advice of the health council in Madrid had now witnessed just how destructive the ordinances were. The deaths were preventable, and the suffering was unnecessary. Finally, the council of Avila and the *junta de peste* decided that a meeting with the professional medical community in Avila was needed to formally discuss the catastrophe. The records note, “Today it is to be determined by medicos, surgeons and barbers: his majesty commanded they be joined this afternoon at two o clock with the members of the *junta*.”⁵⁸⁵ One would imagine that the local government, realizing that the poor were

⁵⁸² ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, 26 enero, 1600,

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 31a.

dying and in need of clothing, would put a stop to the counterproductive plague ordinances.

On 27 January, 1600, a similar synopsis of recent events was delivered at the *ayuntamiento*, lamenting that “the remaining people are so poor and miserable.” Just as had been mentioned in the cathedral, Luis Pacheco reported that many went “naked to bed.” Furthermore, those who were “without a bed” or had little clothing suffered even more because “the temperature is very cold.”⁵⁸⁶ By late January, many in the city knew that “their bodies are cold and many of them are dying,” according to the notary.⁵⁸⁷ After the presentation of these reports, the cathedral chapter and the council began a series of formal grievances directed to the *corregidor*. Their demands included allocating funds for new clothing and bedding for those who been stripped of their garments. Second, they wanted the ordinances to confiscate clothing to be halted. Even after presenting this evidence, however, the council could not put a halt to the King’s orders. Not surprisingly, a few voices from the lower echelons of society also expressed their dissatisfaction and pleaded with their magistrates to halt the stripping and burning of clothes.⁵⁸⁸ Upon hearing the complaints, the *corregidor* sent a message to the king, assuring the council members that relief would eventually be brought to the city.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 31b.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁸⁸ The municipal records lack details. The notaries simply state that many poor residents have come to express their dissatisfaction and the *ayuntamiento* was searching for a solution to their problem. The dialogue and details of these conversations are not in the protocols.

While messages were drafted to be sent to Madrid, conditions in Avila continued to get worse as newly reported infections emerged. The men tasked with burning the clothes continued “carrying and burning clothes from some of the houses.” After weeks of confiscating clothing, other health conditions and “varying illnesses” began to be reported.⁵⁸⁹ While cold weather itself does not spread sicknesses, modern scientific research has demonstrated that colder temperatures can hamper the effectiveness of the body’s immune system to respond to pathogens. Since the subject is more vulnerable to the harmful effects of lethal microbes, colder temperatures allow illnesses to spread. Cold weather and lack of clothing intensified the lethality of the outbreak and allowed other pathogens to infect the population.⁵⁹⁰

As the city council waited for a response from the authorities in Madrid, the *regidores* sent out their *mayordomo* to distribute blankets to help those dying from the cold in the meantime. Those who had suffered the most from the pestilence were “people very poor” who aimlessly walked throughout the town “without any type of clothes, neither a coat” in the harsh winter weather.⁵⁹¹ Several of these people “were petitioning

⁵⁸⁹ The records do not specify the type of illness or what type of sicknesses are spreading. AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 32.

⁵⁹⁰ While there is no direct evidence from the archives to substantiate this claim, historians, such as Ann Carmichael, have argued that the lack of sustenance and poor conditions, in general, exacerbate the effects of pestilence. See Ann Carmichael, *Poor Relief in Renaissance*.

⁵⁹¹ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 29.

and continue to petition to the city and to his majesty of the said high major to send” supplies.⁵⁹² Begging the *corregidor* to ask the king for mercy and to deliver new clothing and bedding for the benefit of the poor, groups of men now went to “search for blankets” for the freezing bodies.⁵⁹³ The *mayordomo* of the city council was commanded to hand out “blankets” for those in need. The butler would later be compensated 3,500 *maravedis* for his services during the year of the pestilence.⁵⁹⁴ Without adequate clothing or bedding, the misfortunate of Avila were in dire need of municipal assistance. The notaries recorded how it was “seen that many were dying” in several “barrios” throughout Avila, and the *corregidor* responded to their call. “His majesty of the high major” acknowledged that “this weather” was worsening all forms of “contagious sicknesses.”

To attenuate the effects of this disaster, funds were allocated to bring some relief to the crises.⁵⁹⁵ Understanding full well the nature of the calamity, the *corregidor* “agreed to the remedy with all the due diligence and punctuality.”⁵⁹⁶ Bringing much needed

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ This reference is from 10 October, 1601, almost two years after the epidemic. In 1601, the council decided to pay the *mayordomo* for his past services for which he was not compensated for. They listed all his deeds and hard work during “they year of the plague,” which included giving blankets to the poor. This reference also notes that many had perished from the weather, which suggests that memories of those who had died from the cold temperatures were not forgotten. AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 26, 199.

⁵⁹⁵ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 29a.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

clothes and bedding would alleviate some of the agony for the people, but such an action, of course, requires money. To raise needed funds, Don Fernando de Escobar and the Doctor Lorenzo explained that they “had taken from the *sisa* for the remedy of the health.”⁵⁹⁷ The *sisa*, which was a tax collected on foodstuffs, would be “spent on medicos boticas, surgeons, barbers, the sick, and other things that had been necessary in the hospital where they cure the sick.”⁵⁹⁸ The *junta* emphasized that all their actions were “done with honesty and Christianity and was done well.”⁵⁹⁹ Cognizant of the unrelenting suffering, the city council also agreed to distribute funds from the public granary to provide financial support for the hospitals and charitable organizations working to heal the sick. The *corregidor* gave to the notary a “provision and license to this city to distribute 66,840 *maravedís* that are left over from the public granary of bread for the poor.”⁶⁰⁰

Even though much needed funds were being allocated, it was necessary to tackle the root cause of much of the suffering: the ordinance to burn clothes. After an arduous waiting period the council received a message from Madrid, but sadly, the crown simply reiterated the existing orders. Once “an order had now come from the council of health,” the council met to discuss the royal *cedula*, which explained that “the king our lord” had

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

commanded “that all the clothes of the sick who had been *apestados* be taken and burned.”⁶⁰¹ Philip III thus decided to sustain his position and not change plans, favoring a strict adherence to the advice of his medical advisers “because they have experience” in matters pertaining to health.⁶⁰² Thus, the health board stood its ground even though “most who had removed their clothes were people so abject that removing the blankets from them in which they used to sleep” could cause them to die.⁶⁰³ The directives therefore continued to be implemented and no article of clothing or blanket was “remaining with them with which to cover themselves.”⁶⁰⁴ Stripped of dignity and left unprotected from the elements, the poor of Avila had to continue to suffer since the health board clung to its quixotic policy. Nevertheless, everyone in the city knew what actions needed to be taken. One main thing could remedy the victims’ suffering, namely, more clothing. Some *regidores* argued that “clothes are needed to remedy” this ongoing catastrophe.

In the same meeting, the councilmen reaffirmed the King’s plans to continue confiscating pestilential fabrics and did not relent from their position. Upon assembling in the *ayuntamiento*, the council of Avila commanded: “the men are to be accompanied by his majesty of the said high major, for the purpose of collecting clothes from those

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.,

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

who have the contagion.”⁶⁰⁵ Nothing, so it seems, could stop the ordinances to burn the clothes. The *regidores* gave specific instructions, ordering that teams of men should “begin [looking for *apestados*] near the street of San Francisco and in the house of the prebendary Mendoza.”⁶⁰⁶

Exacerbating the many problems and chaotic situation in Avila, the designated Plague Hospital of Avila, the Hospital de Dios Padre, was only partially operational, since it was still undergoing a series of repairs. On Friday, 4 February, 1600, Luis Pacheco, who was a *regidor* and one of the officers of the *junta* went to the cathedral to update the chapter on the ongoing repairs to the *Hospital de Dios Padre*. As recorded in the protocols, Pacheco “came to this chapter and gave report of how the rooms and the ward of the *Hospital de Dios Padre* were being repaired, [since this is] where the sick *apestados* have been cured.”⁶⁰⁷ His report stated that the weather and the conditions were so harsh that the construction workers “were not able to make the necessary repairs.”⁶⁰⁸ He made special reference to the “harsh, icy, and cold weather.”⁶⁰⁹ The workers were taking “much caution, guarding from the weather” so that they could finish

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 31

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 31

⁶⁰⁷ ACA, actas capitulares, Tomo 33, 4 febrero, 1600

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

construction.⁶¹⁰ The ongoing construction meant that the hospital could not offer care or shelter: “they are not able to provide the cure to the contagious who are in the said hospital.”⁶¹¹ With the hospital under reconstruction, ongoing famine, plague infecting unsuspecting victims, and clothing being confiscated from the poor, the winter of 1599-1600 claimed numerous residents of Avila.⁶¹²

Despite the great suffering, deaths, and pleas for assistance from the cathedral and the council to provide proper bedding and for clothes, the council still – even being fully aware of its catastrophic failures – applied the measures ordered by the health board in Madrid. It is likely that they understood the ramifications of confiscating cloth, but still on 15 April, 1600, the city “agreed that all contaminated clothing, which are to be taken, be burned. Observing the orders for the remedies, [the council commanded that the clothing] may be burned in the outside fields.”⁶¹³ Thus, even though two months had

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Serafín Tapia’s meticulous study of demographic trends in Avila shows that from June of 1599 to February of 1600, the population of commoners – based on records from seven parishes – dropped from 2,626 to 2,364, respectively (74). These figures, according to Tapia, do not provide a complete image of the demographic shift for two main reasons. First, the deaths of children under the age of seven were not included in some of the parish records (37). Second, if an infant died before being baptized, the parish did not register the death (35). The figures that Tapia presents should be seen as the minimum amount of fatalities among commoners who were parishioners of one of the seven parishes. Although clergy, nobility, infants, and other parishes were omitted from this study, the precision in Tapia’s methodology provides us with partial – but accurate – assessment of demographic fluctuation.

⁶¹³ AMA, actas consistoriales, Libro 25, 93b; on this day, the council also ordered that streets should be cleaned.

passed since formal complaints were made about these public health policies, the council of Avila continued to burn clothes. It appears that the council adhered to Mercado's ethos of "Public Castigation," since their policies were so unrelenting through 1599-1600.

Conclusion:

Considerable evidence confirms, indirectly that the policies of confiscating clothing and bedding carried out during the height of winter – January of 1600 – inadvertently killed many poor men, women, and children who did not have adequate clothing or blankets. The city's plan was to quickly and effectively eradicate the "seedbed" of disease embedded in objects, particularly fabrics such as clothing and blankets. The events in the winter of 1599-1600 show the implementation of their policies, which demonstrates that the city council and *junta de peste* of Avila followed Mercados' unique version of contagionism. Doing so, however, had detrimental consequences.

Some of the suspected *apestados* made formal complaints and lamented about their misfortunes. They demanded that their confiscated bedding and clothing be replaced with new ones, and while the city council made note of their pleas and forwarded the requests to the crown, minimal action was taken to alleviate the suffering. The council's main concern was rebuilding the hospital, which had been in a decrepit

state. After a several months of agony, the city also began handing out food from the granary, which did not directly address the issue of the lack of clothing but sought to bring some relief to the misery.

The resulting combination of the council's strict adherence to Mercado's ethos of "fire and castigation" and social technologies of medicine, which were designed to protect the republic, ended up doing more harm. Any regular resident would be able to recognize that such a measure in the brutal winter would kill residents who had not fled. One must then ask, why did the *regidores* who lived through the same icy weather execute such measures? In my view, this case demonstrates the power of a utilitarian mindset. That is to say, they executed these measures thinking that their actions were ultimately for the greater good and the protection of the city, even if their decisions harmed those suffering from plague. A rigid application of Mercado's theories blinded the *regidores* in Avila, who seemingly ignored common sense when executing his plans.

What is also key to recognize is that *apestados* themselves were not targeted in this epidemic – just their belongings. This suggests that the body itself was not considered contagious. Unlike previous outbreaks, as soon as the pestilence arrived in late 1599, the initial plan of action was to strip suspected *apestados* of their clothing. The sickly bodies of foreigners were virtually absent from the records. In lieu of targeting foreigners, the object was to "burn all the beds" and clothes first, and afterwards, "move the family [...] to another house."⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁴ Luis de Mercado, *Libro de peste en españa*, 55.

We may therefore conclude that driven by changes in medical knowledge and learning, a key procedural shift took place by the late sixteenth century. While the city did raise its guard, a policy that targeted foreigners was absent in the records, whereas in previous epidemics, policies established strict control at the gates. By the late sixteenth century, foreign bodies were no longer seen as the principal threat, which was reflected in the drive to eradicate all pestilential fabrics. However, such ordinances only became official once the threat of the outbreak was near. Thus, plague, as an external agent, generated fear, havoc, and uncertainty. The city council, in turn, reacted to the threat by closely adhering to the best medical expert of the time, who in this case was Luis de Mercado.

CONCLUSION

My initial objective for this dissertation was to see how the Spanish state and Church reacted to epidemics of plague, and how these natural disasters diverted the goals of the contemporaneous Catholic Reformation at work in the Spanish communities. Before conducting the research phase of this dissertation, I postulated that religious reform efforts in sixteenth century Spain, which can loosely be referred to as the Catholic Reformation, clashed with existing spiritual methods of healing during outbreak of plague.⁶¹⁵ Some historians have claimed that the monarchs of Europe worked in conjunction with Catholic authorities to issue a series of doctrinal and liturgical revisions designed to purge religious pluralism, discipline an immoral clergy, and rejuvenate a lackadaisical episcopacy in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century.⁶¹⁶ Such efforts were part of a broader trend in late medieval and early modern European Catholicism centered on addressing Protestant critiques. Through institutions such as the Spanish Inquisition, the monarchs sought to standardize religious practices, making it uniform throughout the

⁶¹⁵ The precise meanings and nuances of the terms “Catholic Reformation,” “Counter-Reformation,” “Tridentine Reformation,” “Reformation Europe,” and “Early Modern Catholicism” have been a point of acrimonious debate. I use the term “Catholic Reformation” to describe the multiple transformations of Catholicism from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. For an in-depth explanation of these technical terms see John O’Malley, *Trent and All that: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000)

⁶¹⁶; Sara Nalle demonstrated that by the late sixteenth century, residents showed a marked improvement in their knowledge of the Catechism. See “Learning and lesson” *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992);

peninsula.⁶¹⁷ The success of such reform efforts, however, were questionable.⁶¹⁸ Men and women of the lower ranks of society were in some instances resistant to restructuring their spiritual lives.⁶¹⁹ I aimed to see if epidemics of pestilence were moments when believers from the lower echelons of society utilized less orthodox means of religious

⁶¹⁷ Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Inquisitorial records from Toledo, Dedieu outlines how the Catholic Church, with the diligent support of the Holy Office, created “communal religious” practices. The Church acted as a mechanism of control by enforcing the memorization of fundamental prayers (*Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo*, and *Salve Regina*) and basic theology. Dedieu portrays the Archbishopric of Toledo as a powerful establishment, which was, for the most part, successful in its mission to catechize the masses. Jean-Pierre Dedieu, ““Christianization” in New Castile Catechism, Communion, Mass, and Confirmation in the Toledo Archbishopric, 1540-1650” in *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain*, eds. Anne Cruz and Mary E. Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992)

⁶¹⁸ Sara Nalle in *God in La Mancha*, for example, traced the transformation of Catholicism from pre- to post- Council of Trent in Cuenca. Her analysis, most importantly, draws attention to the Inquisition as an agent of reform, which sought to correct doctrinal errors, ignorance of dogma, and the apathetic clergy of Cuenca. Standing in opposition to the concept of a unified Catholic Spain, Nalle noted that *conversos* and Old Christians – regardless of class, gender, or wealth – were both treated as “bad Christians” by the Inquisition’s leaders. Despite the imposition of Catholic doctrine on the people of Cuenca, Nalle argued that the traditional forms of religion, prior to the Council of Trent, still resisted the wide-ranging changes that took place; however, by the late sixteenth century, a marked improvement in popular knowledge of the catechism was detectable. Sara Nalle, *God in La Mancha*, 14.

⁶¹⁹ Henry Kamen argued that the adoption of official Catholicism was not a wholesale absorption; on the contrary, “the piety of the universal Church was adopted and domesticated for local use.” Thus, while reform did take place, it was a slow and gradual process. Furthermore, Catholicism was enmeshed with local Catalan traditions and beliefs. Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter Reformation*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Allyson Poska emphasized the ineffectiveness of Tridentine reforms in the diocese of Ourense – located in the northwest corner of the Iberian Peninsula. According to Poska, the transformation of popular Catholicism was minor and old customs continued to carry over into the modern era. Allyson Poska, *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain*. (Boston: Brill, 1998), 161.

healing, which could obstruct the goals of religious reform. Although the initial objective was to analyze how and in what ways Catholic Reform efforts in Spain shaped understandings of pestilence, death, and healing at the local level, upon completing the research phase of the dissertation, the available evidence led my argument down a different path.

The findings from this study demonstrate that local authorities and residents handled and coped with the catastrophe in different ways from one epidemic to the next. Strategies used to limit mortality rates transmuted based upon evolving renaissance medical theories and the restructuring of professional medical licensing program in the 1580s. Similarly, European-wide Catholic religious reform efforts partially influenced the signs and symbols of the autochthonous spiritual traditions used to cope with the looming threat of death in Avila. While broader early modern medical and religious changes influenced local responses to disasters, it was plague, as an external agent of historical change, that set these transformations in motion.

The emotional and psychological trauma brought on by the pestilence and abnormal weather conditions pushed the *abulenses* to adapt for survival. Plague itself did not shape civic or religious identity or culture, but it did force the *abulenses* to seek special intercession from local saints and holy objects, adopt new public health procedures, and allocate funds to guard against the outbreak. While doing so, the social spaces, cultures, identities, and religious traditions of the city took new shape. Plague, as an exogenous force of historical change, influenced this process of transmutation.

The *abulenses* faced a repeated, devastating and fear-inducing threat in the epidemics of the sixteenth century. Their complex reactions, mirroring a changing world, show that public health and religious responses to epidemics of plague lacked a uniform, coherent system of procedures. Just like early modern medical knowledge, reactions to outbreaks shifted based upon evolving medical theories, local political tensions, and environmental conditions. In the early sixteenth century, municipal authorities targeted sources of miasma to curb the proliferation of miasmatic airs; however, decades later, tactics shifted as agents of the city collected and burned clothing that was suspected of transmitting the pestilence. While religious devotion in the early sixteenth century focused on late medieval spirituality, by the late century, such practices do not seem to be common, although memories of them were. Nancy Siraisi brilliantly articulated that medicine in the fifteenth to the seventeenth century was “never a single, clearly delimited entity but, rather, a diverse collection of areas of knowledge and of intellectual interests and commitments, pursued in the context of a variety of institutions, occupations, skills and activities.”⁶²⁰ Sixteenth century responses to outbreaks were equally as multifaceted and flexible.

⁶²⁰ Nancy G. Siraisi, “Medicine, 1450-1620, and the History of Science.” *Isis* 103 (2012), 492.

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