

From Purification to Protection: Plague Response in Late Medieval Valencia

By Abigail Agresta

On the morning of 6 July 1395, the city council of Valencia met in the council chamber. Plague had been in the city since March, and despite the council's best efforts, the death toll continued to rise. This morning, the councilmen authorized several new measures to combat the epidemic. They organized charitable donations "to placate divine anger," and a procession to the chapel of Our Lady of Mercy to "beseech divine mercy for the said plague." Immediately thereafter, they authorized funds for the removal of "dead dogs, cats, rats, and other dead things that people throw in the streets and squares, and which in these times of summer and epidemic give great corruption to the city."¹

Almost in one breath, the council addressed both the immediate, material source of the plague and the divine anger that was its ultimate cause. Both hygienic and ritual approaches to public health have received considerable attention in the last few decades, but rarely together. Scholars of medieval public health have established beyond doubt that medieval and early modern city governments were concerned about issues of hygiene and devised measures to limit the spread of disease.² They have also made clear that sacred and secular medicine were closely

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¹ "Item lo dit Consell per placar la ira divina & obtenir d'aquella relevatio de la present plaga de mortaldat . . . atorga & provei que sia feta caritat & almoyna a pobres vergonyants . . . Mes avant ordena & provehi . . . que dicmenge prop vinent sia feta general processo . . . per impetrar la divina misericordia sobre a dita plaga . . . que en lo present temps d'estiu & de epidemia daven gran corrupcio a la dita Ciutat cans gats rates & semblants coses mortes que les Gents lancen per places & per carrers," Valencia, Archivo Municipal de Valencia [hereafter AMV], MS A-20 (Manuals de Consells), fols. 241v–242r.

² Among the many recent works on medieval and early modern public health, see Zlata Blažina Tomić and Vesna Blažina, *Expelling the Plague: The Health Office and the Implementation of Quarantine in Dubrovnik, 1377–1533*, McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health, and Society 43 (Montreal, 2015); Kristy Wilson Bowers, *Plague and Public Health in Early Modern Seville* (Rochester, NY, 2013); Janna Coomans and Guy Geltner, "On the Street and in the Bathhouse: Medieval Galenism in Action?," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 43/1 (2013): 53–82; Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham, UK, 2012); G. Geltner, *Roads to Health: Infrastructure and Public Wellbeing in Later Medieval Italy* (Philadelphia, 2019); Teresa Huguet-Termes, "Madrid Hospitals and Welfare in the Context of the Hapsburg Empire," in *Health and Medicine in Hapsburg Spain: Agents, Practices, Representations*, ed. Teresa Huguet-Termes, Jon Arrizabalaga, and Harold J. Cook, *Medical History Supplement* 29 (London, 2009), 64–85; Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge, UK, 2013).

intertwined in the eyes of physicians, clergy, and the general public.³ Nonetheless, the sacred side of medieval public health still receives more attention from historians of religion than from historians of medicine.⁴ Although studies often cite anecdotal evidence of rituals that medieval governments organized during plagues and other disasters, there has been little consideration of how these responses worked within broader understandings of the disasters in question.⁵ This article contends that in Valencia, municipal religious responses to plague were devised according to the same logic as those more frequently associated with public health. The Christian city government's religious responses (intended to address divine anger) and its material responses (intended to counter earthly causes and effects) formed a coherent vision of the workings of disease in the Valencian environment—one that changed dramatically over time in both its religious and material forms.⁶ Until the later fifteenth century, the city council treated plague as the result of corruption, and therefore sought to cleanse both the material and the moral environment under its rule. Around 1475, however, the council shifted focus; it began to treat plague as contagious and enlisted both material and spiritual protectors to guard the city's perimeter against external threat.

The Valencian city council did not, as a rule, blame natural disasters on religious minorities or other marginalized social groups. The evidence suggests that the council laid blame only for plague, and not for droughts, floods, or locust swarms. When the council blamed plague on certain sins or sinners, the logic of that blame was not generic to natural disaster, but rather, was specific to plague. The councilmen associated plague with sinners because they understood plague, indeed disease in general, as the result of corruption, moral and material. The sins thought to cause plague were sins of corruption: sins that implicated and threatened the entire social body of the city. When, in the later fifteenth century, the council's medical focus shifted from corruption to contagion, a corresponding shift occurred in civic religious response to rituals that were protective rather than purifying. Plague ritual in Valencia

³ See, for example, John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven, 2006); Naama Cohen-Hanegbi, *Caring for the Living Soul: Emotions, Medicine and Penance in the Late Medieval Mediterranean*, *The Medieval Mediterranean* 110 (Leiden, 2017); and Justin K. Stearns, *Infectious Ideas: Contagion in Premodern Islamic and Christian Thought in the Western Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2011).

⁴ Exceptions include Peregrine Horden, "Ritual and Public Health in the Early Medieval City," in *Body and City: Histories of Urban Public Health*, ed. Sally Sheard and Helen Power (Aldershot, UK, 2000), 17–40; and Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 55–115. For religious treatments of plague response, see Jussi Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival: Responses to Natural Disasters in the Middle Ages*, *Studia Fennica: Historica* 2 (Helsinki, 2002); Heinrich Dormeier, "Saints as Protectors against Plague: Problems of Definition and Economic and Social Implications," in *Living with the Black Death*, ed. Lars Bisgaard and Leif Søndergaard, *University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and Social Sciences* 377 (Odense, 2009); Stearns, *Infectious Ideas*; and William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, NJ, 1981). See also Justin Stearns, "New Directions in the Study of Religious Responses to the Black Death," *History Compass* 7/5 (2009): 1363–75, which includes Islamic and Jewish responses.

⁵ For example, Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 55–115.

⁶ Cohen-Hanegbi has made a similar argument about Castilian medical practitioners in *Caring for the Living Soul*, 134–70.

thus developed over time and in response to changing notions of disease, just as other public health practices did.

This article examines the Valencian city government's responses to plague in the later medieval period, from the Black Death of 1348 to the plague that began the Revolt of the Brotherhoods (*Germanies*) in 1519. The city was governed at this time by six *jurats* (four citizens and two noblemen), and a larger, less powerful *consell* with representatives from the aristocracy, the parishes, and the guilds. The term of office was only one year, but as the jurats controlled the selection of their successors, the same figures and the same families dominated the municipal government throughout this period.⁷ Individual members of this government must have differed in their aims, and been subject to political and social pressures that can be only partly reconstructed today. Nor would the council's official positions have been the only interpretations of plague in Valencia, even if they are sometimes the only ones that survive. Popular preachers, for example, very often interpreted plagues differently than the council did, and their audiences must have drawn their own conclusions. The relative completeness of the municipal records, however, unusual for Iberia in this period, allows municipal responses to plague (and to other natural disasters) to be studied more systematically than is possible elsewhere. Beyond the fact of their survival, the official statements of the council would have stood out from what must have been a chorus of opinions on plague. As the council was able to compel participation in its chosen plague responses, even those who disagreed with the official account of plague would have been forced to engage with it. It therefore mattered very much whom or what the council blamed for a natural disaster, and how it did so. As this article will show, moreover, the views of successive councils remained remarkably consistent over time. Generations of councilmen participated in the construction of what Ann Carmichael has termed "the collective memory of plague."⁸

Although the Valencian council sometimes cooperated with local doctors, its notion of "plague" (*plaga*, *mortal dat*, or occasionally *glanola*) remains an ill-defined quantity, which cannot be equated to modern diagnoses of bubonic plague. Recent advances in aDNA analysis of human remains from a number of archaeological sites, including Barcelona, have confirmed the presence of *Yersinia pestis* during the Black Death of 1348.⁹ Most subsequent outbreaks of plague remain to be similarly confirmed, but the presumption of the scholarly community is that most of these also were outbreaks of bubonic plague.¹⁰ Medieval observers may, however, have folded

⁷ Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, *Valencia, municipio medieval: Poder político y luchas ciudadanas, 1239–1418*, Colección "minor" (Valencia, Spain) 6 (Valencia, 1995), 25–52.

⁸ Ann G. Carmichael, "The Last Past Plague: The Uses of Memory in Renaissance Epidemics," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 53/2 (1998), 132–60.

⁹ Maria A. Spyrou et al., "Historical *Y. pestis* Genomes Reveal the European Black Death as the Source of Ancient and Modern Plague Pandemics," *Cell Host & Microbe* 19/6 (2016): 874–81. See also Kirsten I. Bos et al., "A draft genome of *Yersinia pestis* from victims of the Black Death," *Nature* 478 (2011): 506–10.

¹⁰ For evidence that plague persisted in Europe after 1348, see Kirsten I. Bos et al., "Eighteenth-century *Yersinia pestis* Genomes Reveal the Long-term Persistence of an Historical Plague Focus," *eLife* 5 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.12994>; and Lisa Seifert et al., "Genotyping *Yersinia pestis* in Historical Plague: Evidence for Long-Term Persistence of *Y. pestis* in Europe from the 14th to the 17th Century," *PLoS ONE* 11/1, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0145194>.

outbreaks of other diseases, such as typhus, into the “plague” category. This is particularly likely to have been the case in Valencia, which, although possessed of an early medical licensing system and a network of municipal hospitals, lacked an official medical infrastructure, and thus any detailed record of plague symptoms.¹¹ As it is not possible at present to diagnose each Valencian outbreak conclusively, the conclusions of this article do not rest on the specific characteristics of *Y. pestis*.

This article treats plague as one of several types of natural disaster that struck the city of Valencia in the late Middle Ages. Although no disaster is ever truly “natural,” the term *natural disasters* is used narrowly, to refer to crises that, whatever their ultimate causes, were thought to emerge from the environment. That plague was considered a natural disaster in this sense is clear from Luis García-Ballester’s definition of medieval health as “a balance between [an] individual’s body and the environment.” According to this understanding, a catastrophic outbreak of disease emerged from the environment, and affected all living things.¹² Thus Jacme d’Agramont averred that the Black Death had caused orange trees in Valencia, Mallorca, and Barcelona to die.¹³ Examining plague in this context allows unique features of plague response to be distinguished from those common to all natural disasters. As a number of scholars have demonstrated, medieval people did not necessarily understand all disasters as divine punishment, nor was prayer the only means of response.¹⁴ The city government of Valencia treated plagues, as it treated droughts, floods, locusts, and the occasional earthquake, with a combination of religious and material responses, used both separately and in combination.¹⁵ This article will therefore begin with a look at what distinguished plague response from responses to other types of natural disaster, then move on to the changing features of plague response: first the council’s focus on moral and material corruption, and then the shift, in the later fifteenth century, to the dangers of contagion.

¹¹ On a suspected outbreak of typhus in the fifteenth century and the state medical infrastructure in Milan, see Ann G. Carmichael, “Epidemics and State Medicine in Fifteenth-Century Milan,” in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga, Andrew Cunningham, and Luis García-Ballester (Aldershot, UK, 1998), 221–47. On Valencia’s medical licensing system, Luis García-Ballester, Michael R. McVaugh, and Agustín Rubio-Vela, *Medical Licensing and Learning in Fourteenth-Century Valencia*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 79 (Philadelphia, 1989); on its hospitals, Agustín Rubio Vela, *Pobreza, enfermedad y asistencia hospitalaria en la Valencia del siglo XIV*, Estudios universitarios (Institución Alfonso el Magnánimo) 10 (Valencia, 1984).

¹² Luis García-Ballester, “The Construction of a New Form of Learning and Practicing Medicine in Medieval Latin Europe,” in *Galen and Galenism: Theory and Medical Practice from Antiquity to the European Renaissance*, ed. Jon Arrizabalaga, Montserrat Cabré, Lluís Cifuentes, and Fernando Salmón, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS710 (Aldershot, UK, 2002), 89.

¹³ Jacme d’Agramont, *Regiment de preservació de pestilència (1348)*, ed. Joan Veny, 2nd ed. Col·lecció Scripta 7 (Barcelona, 2015), 66.

¹⁴ Christopher M. Gerrard and David N. Petley, “A Risk Society? Environmental Hazards, Risk and Resilience in the Later Middle Ages in Europe,” *Natural Hazards* 69/1 (2013): 1051–79; Laurence Moulinier and Odile Redon, “L’inondation de 1333 à Florence: Récit et hypothèses de Giovanni Villani,” *Médiévales* 36 (1999): 91–104; Christian Rohr, “Man and Natural Disaster in the Late Middle Ages: The Earthquake in Carinthia and Northern Italy on 25 January 1348 and Its Perception,” *Environment and History* 9/2 (2003), 127–49.

¹⁵ Only one earthquake was recorded during this period (AMV, A-21, fol. 155r). On urban fire, see Carmel Ferragud and Juan Vicente García Marsilla, “The Great Fire of Medieval Valencia (1447),” *Urban History* 43/4 (2016): 500–516.

BLAME AND NATURAL DISASTER

Examining plague as a natural disaster throws two points into sharp relief. First, in Valencia it was rare for the city council officially to attribute a disaster to any particular sin or group of sinners. Second, when it did hold particular sinners responsible, the disaster in question was almost always plague. Not disasters generally, but plagues in particular, prompted the placing of blame. From the mid-fourteenth century on, those blamed were usually Christians.

Historians have often associated medieval disaster response with scapegoating, particularly of religious minorities.¹⁶ The attacks on Jews during the Black Death, which occurred in a number of places in Europe and the Crown of Aragon, are the clearest example of such a phenomenon.¹⁷ The focus on the Black Death as a primary example has, however, distorted our understanding of what the relationship between blame and disaster usually looked like in the Middle Ages. Even though many disasters were understood as divine punishment, it did not necessarily follow that they were attributable to whichever group was most despised by God.¹⁸

For Christian civic authorities in medieval Valencia, the association between disaster and sin worked in one of two ways. Either a specific set of sins and sinners had triggered divine anger, or the calamity was the result of the sins of the population in general. In the former case, the council instituted moral reforms targeting specific sins, while in the latter it organized penitential rogation processions. Both approaches sought to appease God's anger, but the effect was quite different. Naming specific sins focused blame on particular groups, while citing humanity's sinfulness diffused the responsibility over the population as a whole. These rituals were designed to exclude non-Christians, but nothing about their form or framing implicated the absent Muslims and Jews in the crisis.¹⁹

It was, therefore, perfectly possible to concoct a religious response to disaster without blaming any group in particular. The Valencian council almost always preferred collective penitence over targeted reform. Between 1306, the date of the first surviving records, and 1519, Valencia suffered some seventy droughts. In only

¹⁶ For example, Jacques Berlioz, *Catastrophes naturelles et calamités au Moyen Âge*, Micrologus Library 1 (Florence, 1998), 20–26; Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival*, 101–4; most recently, Joëlle Rollo-Koster, “Failed Ritual? Medieval Papal Funerals and the Death of Clement VI (1352),” in *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials*, ed. Christos Lynteris and Nicholas H. A. Evans (Cham, Switzerland, 2018), 30.

¹⁷ See in particular Anna Colet, Josep Xavier Muntané i Santiveri, Jordi Ruíz Ventura, Oriol Saula, M. Eulàlia Subirà de Galdàcano, and Clara Jáuregui, “The Black Death and Its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrraga: Lessons from History and Archeology,” *The Medieval Globe* 1/1 (2014), 63–96. Also, Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens*, Civilisations et sociétés 35 (Paris, 1975), 57–65, and Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., “The Black Death and the Burning of the Jews,” *Past and Present* 196/1 (2007), 3–36. For Valencia, see Matías Calvo Gálvez and Josep Vicent Lerma, “Peste negra y pogromo en la ciudad de Valencia: La evidencia arqueológica,” *Revista de arqueología* 19 (1998), 50–59.

¹⁸ For the complexities of blame within Jewish communities in Iberia, see Susan L. Einbinder, *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration among Iberian Jews* (Philadelphia, 2018), esp. 47–53.

¹⁹ On Christian penitence as a religiously exclusive practice in Iberia, see Cohen-Hanebi, *Caring for the Living Soul*, 168–69.

one of those did the city council blame a specific set of sinners, and that instance was quite early, before the Black Death.²⁰ In no other case, before or after, did the council blame a drought on a specific sin or social group. Nor did the council ever link a flood or a swarm of locusts to any specific sins. In the vast majority of cases, as noted earlier, the council did not blame anyone for the natural disasters that occurred in the city. When it did, the natural disaster in question tended to be plague.

After the Black Death, the sinners that the Valencian council blamed for plague were almost always Christians, but in the first half of the fourteenth century, the councilmen occasionally asserted that the sins of religious minorities, or mixing between faiths, would lead to disaster. In 1326, the council proclaimed that the sins of the city, including mixing between religious groups, had prompted God to “engender in the air diverse tempests of menace . . . and even cause illnesses and sudden deaths to those who do not convert themselves to good and divorce themselves from sin.”²¹ In a 1335 letter, the jurats complained to the king that Muslim men were consorting with one another and with Christian prostitutes in suburban taverns, and had brought down the wrath of God in the form of drought, famine, hail, fog, illnesses, and sudden deaths.²² Similarly, in 1351, the bishop of Valencia requested the city’s help in prosecuting sins in the Muslim and Jewish quarters “so that . . . our all-powerful Lord God not send us pestilences in the earth.”²³ In none of these cases, however, was a plague, famine, or other disaster actually taking place in Valencia city.²⁴ All of these statements were rhetorical; none was made during an environmental crisis.

About the council’s response to the Black Death itself, little can be known for certain. As elsewhere in the Crown of Aragon, the Jews of Valencia were attacked. The massacre in Valencia, however, is known only from the 1994 archaeological discovery of a mass grave in the city’s Jewish cemetery. Alongside plague victims, this grave contained the bodies of twelve individuals bearing evidence of fatal injuries, many inflicted with swords by attackers on horseback.²⁵ This suggests that at least some of the attackers were wealthy: perhaps the councilmen themselves were among

²⁰ In 1345, the council said that a drought was due to God’s displeasure at the vain habits of the city’s women, who persisted in wearing “long skirts and short cloaks and other apparel” (“longues faldes en mantells cots & altres vestidurs”), AMV A-4, fol. 484v.

²¹ “enjendrà en l’air diverse tempstats a cominació e menaces . . . et encara dóna malalties e morts soptanes a terror d’aquells qui nos convertexen a bé a fer e desexir-se de pecats,” transcribed in Vicent Anyó Garcia, ed., *El Primer Manual de Consells de la Ciutat de València (1306–1326), Estudi i transcripció*, Colección “minor” (Valencia, Spain) 8 (Valencia, 2001), 396–98, fols. 280v–282r.

²² AMV g3-1, fol. 51r–51v.

²³ “que per . . . nostre senyor deu tot poderos no volgues trametre pestilenties en la terra,” AMV A-10, fol. 25v.

²⁴ Although Rubio Vela has taken the 1326 and 1335 documents as evidence of a plague, this is shaky ground (Rubio Vela, *Pesta Negra*, 20–21). For 1326, the text of the document makes such an interpretation unlikely; if an epidemic were present, it would be unusual for the council to declare that only sinners would die. The only evidence for a plague around 1335 comes from another 1335 letter that blames an epidemic in the previous year (1334) on rice irrigation, AMV g3-1, fols. 37r–39v. The 1351 letter is clearly phrased as a hypothetical.

²⁵ Matías Calvo Gálvez and Josep Vicent Lerma, “Peste Negra y pogrom en la ciudad de Valencia: La evidencia arqueológica,” *Revista de arqueología* 19 (1998): 50–59; Matías Calvo Gálvez, “Necrópolis

them.²⁶ In Valencia, however, the Black Death coincided with the antiroyalist rebellion known as the Union Revolt, in which the city council played a leading role. In fact, when the Black Death arrived in the city in May, the Unionist forces held King Pere the Ceremonious (1336–87) prisoner in the city. Fearing he would die in their care, the rebels released the king in early June. He subsequently rallied his forces, crushed the revolt, and during its suppression ordered the documents of the rebellious city government to be destroyed.²⁷ The Black Death in Valencia thus coincided with a period of intense antiroyalist tensions, about which very little local evidence survives. Both Mark Meyerson and Alexandra Guerson have argued that contemporary assaults on Jews elsewhere in the Crown of Aragon should be understood as part of the rebellion rather than as a response to the plague.²⁸ Although plague and antiroyalism are not mutually exclusive as motives for violence, the latter is just as likely as the former as a context for the Valencian assault.

Unlike antiroyalist violence against Jews, moreover, religious violence associated with natural disaster seems to have stopped with the Black Death.²⁹ As Samuel K. Cohn has argued, attacks on Jews ceased to be common during the plagues that followed the Black Death, although associations between Jews and plague were revived in some places in the early modern period.³⁰ The evidence from Valencia supports Cohn's observation. Later episodes of violence cannot be tied to natural disaster, and rhetorical statements blaming religious minorities largely disappeared.³¹ Although many more records survive from the late fourteenth century on, only one

judía de Valencia: Nuevos datos," in *Juderías y sinagogas de la Sefarad medieval: En memoria de José Luis Lacave Riaño; XI Curso de Cultura Hispano Judía y Sefardí de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha*, ed. Ana María López Álvarez and Ricardo Izquierdo Benito, Colección Humanidades 73 (Cuenca, 2003), 599–601.

²⁶ The city council and mayor of Tàrrega in Catalonia participated in the massacre of that town's Jews in 1348. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 117–47. On the Valencian council's passive collaboration with the later 1391 assault, see Abigail Agresta, "'Unfortunate Jews' and Urban Ugliness: Crafting a Narrative of the 1391 Assault on the *Jueria* of Valencia," *Journal of Medieval History* 43/3 (2017): 320–41.

²⁷ Mateu Rodrigo Lizondo, ed., *Diplomatari de la Unió del Regne de València (1347–1349)*, *Fonts històriques valencianes* 59 (Valencia, 2013), 13–16.

²⁸ Mark D. Meyerson, "Victims and Players: The Attack of the Union of Valencia on the Jews of Morvedre," in *Religion, Text, and Society in Medieval Spain and Northern Europe: Essays in Honor of J. N. Hillgarth*, ed. Thomas E. Burman, Mark D. Meyerson, and Leah Shopkow, *Papers in Mediaeval Studies* 16 (Toronto, 2002), 70–102; Alexandra Eni Paiva Guerson de Oliveira, "Coping with Crises: Christian-Jewish Relations in Catalonia and Aragon, 1380–1391" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012), 28–37, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/32724> (last accessed 22 December 2017).

²⁹ On antiroyalist violence against Jews in Valencia, see the work of David Nirenberg, particularly *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, 2013), 183–216, and *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago, 2014), 75–88.

³⁰ Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of the Jews," 3–36; and Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London, 2002), 223–52. See also the association between Jews and contagion in Udine in 1556 in Carmichael, "The Last Past Plague," 135–38.

³¹ The assaults on the Jewish and Muslim quarters in 1391 and on the Muslim quarter in 1455 did not involve natural disasters. Meyerson associates the violence in 1455 with a drought, but while there is evidence of drought in the city in March of 1455, and again in November, the riot took place in June, and there is no evidence of drought-related tension in the preceding weeks. Mark D. Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* (Berkeley, 1991), 89.

case of religious blaming for natural disaster appears after 1351. In March of 1413, the jurats wrote to the king concerning Judaizing practices among the city's New Christians. Such practices, they declared, "provoke Our Lord to send us plagues and pestilences."³² There was no plague in Valencia in the spring of 1413, but Dominican friar and Valencia native Vicent Ferrer was preaching in the city.³³ Ferrer's sermons, known for their anti-Jewish rhetoric, had a powerful impact on city councils wherever he went.³⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that the council of 1413 expressed somewhat atypical opinions on Jews and disaster. In late medieval Valencia, official blame was not generally a feature of natural disaster response and did not tend to focus on religious minorities. The Valencian city council drew an association between an actual, ongoing disaster and specific sins or sinners seven times after 1351. In all of these cases it blamed Christian sinners, and all were related to plague.³⁵

MATERIAL CORRUPTION

Why plague? What led the city council to associate plague with sins in need of reform? Medieval clergy do not seem to have singled out plague in their sermons. The link between sin and disaster was a staple of medieval preaching, yet Jussi Hanska's studies have found no distinctions in how different types of disaster were thought to relate to sin.³⁶ Plague was not unique spiritually, but it was unique materially, in that its material causes had a potentially moral flavor. As a result, the city government's religious and material efforts to prevent plague proceeded along similar lines. In Galenic medical theory, disease was the result of corruption, which

³² "son occasio de provocar nostre Senyor a donar sobre nosaltres plagues e pestilencies sien de vostra senyoria," AMV g3-11, fols. 190v-191r.

³³ Katherine Lindeman, "Fighting Words: Vengeance, Jews, and Saint Vicent Ferrer in Late-Medieval Valencia," *Speculum* 91/3 (2016): 690-723.

³⁴ On Ferrer's influence over the council, see Lindeman, "Fighting Words," and Philip Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer, His World and Life: Religion and Society in Late Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, UK, 2016), 88-89.

³⁵ Twenty-four known plague outbreaks occurred between 1348 and 1519. Chronicler Melcior Miralles identified 1348, 1362, 1375, 1384, 1395, 1401-02, 1428, 1439, 1450, 1459-60, 1475, and 1478 as the outbreaks leading up to his own day. Melcior Miralles, *Crònica i dietari del capellà d'Alfons el Magnànim*, ed. Mateu Rodrigo Lizondo, *Fonts històriques valencianes* 47 (Valencia, 2011), 3.32, 150-51. To these Rubio Vela added plagues in 1380, 1403, 1410-11, 1414, 1420-21, 1422, 1489-90 and 1494. Rubio Vela, *Pesta Negra*, 27-28; Agustín Rubio Vela, "Las epidemias de peste en la ciudad de Valencia durante el siglo XV: Nuevas aportaciones," *Estudis castellanencs* 6 (1994): 1179-1221. Further outbreaks occurred in 1508, 1509, 1510, and 1519. The council blamed specific sinners twice in 1395, and in 1414, 1450, 1457 (see below), 1489, and 1490.

³⁶ Jussi Hanska, "Cessante causa cessat et effectus: Sin and Natural Disasters in Medieval Sermons," in *Roma, magistra mundi: Itineraria culturae medievalis; Mélanges offerts au Père L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse, *Textes et Études du Moyen Âge* 10 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998): 141-53; Hanska, "Catastrophe Sermons and Apocalyptic Expectations: Eudes de Châteauroux and the Earthquake of 1269 in Viterbo," in *The Last Judgement in Medieval Preaching*, ed. Thom Mertens, Maria Sherwood-Smith, Michael Mecklenburg, and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, *Sermo* 3 (Turnhout, 2013), 117-34.

could be understood in simultaneously material and moral terms.³⁷ Both moral and material misbehavior could result in corruption, which presented a danger if left unchecked. Epidemics had a common cause of corrupt air, water, or food, of which corrupt air, or miasma, was the most common.³⁸ Corrupt air could have many causes: the wrath of God, an unfavorable alignment of the planets (such as the “triple conjunction” of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars that the scholars at Paris blamed for the Black Death), humid winds, the corruption of the dead on a battlefield, or fumes released by earthquakes.³⁹ More prosaically, any decay or stagnation could spread corruption to the air around it and cause illness to those nearby.⁴⁰

The Valencian city council, like city councils across medieval Europe, was therefore constantly trying to avert disease through the regular removal of corrupt matter.⁴¹ Although medical wisdom held that miasmas could as easily be caused by celestial as terrestrial phenomena, the medieval council of Valencia focused on the material world under its control: the world of streets and canals to be cleared of refuse. Corruption was the result of human misbehavior or neglect, which introduced waste or blockage into the fragile urban system.

Jacme d’Agramont, whose 1348 *Regiment de preservació de pestilència*, dedicated to the jurats of Lleida, was both the earliest plague treatise and the one most applicable to the Valencian context, noted that a dirty city was one in danger of plague. In particular, excrement and the bodies, guts, and blood of dead animals, if left in the public space, would cause “great infection in the air.”⁴² Excrement was not much of a problem in Valencia, because of its value as fertilizer. The city awarded licenses to private individuals for the right to remove human and animal waste from the city, and these manure collectors (*femeters*) were so eager to do their work that the council had to forbid them from making collections in the city on Sundays, feast days, or at night after matins.⁴³ Once collected, the excrement was heaped onto suburban compost heaps, well away from public roads, gates, and

³⁷ Jon Arrizabalaga, “Facing the Black Death: Perceptions and Reactions of University Medical Practitioners,” in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis García-Ballester, Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga, and Andrew Cunningham (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 245; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 55–115.

³⁸ Ann G. Carmichael, “Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 44/2 (1991): 229.

³⁹ Laura A. Smoller, “Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia, 2000), 172–73.

⁴⁰ John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague and Death in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (London, 2010), 99.

⁴¹ On the connection between such efforts and Galenic medical theory in the Crown of Aragon, see García-Ballester, “Medicine in Medieval Latin Europe,” 89–91, and Guillem Roca Cabau, “Medidas municipales contra la peste en la Lleida del siglo XIV e inicios del XV,” *Dynamis: Acta hispanica ad medicinae scientiarumque historiam illustrandam* 38/1 (2018): 15–39. For such efforts elsewhere, see Isla Fay, *Health and the City: Disease, Environment, and Government in Norwich, 1200–1575* (Woodbridge, UK, 2015); Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*; Coomans and Geltner, “On the Street and in the Bathhouse”; G. Geltner, “Finding Matter out of Place: Bologna’s ‘Dirt’ (Fango) Officials in the History of Premodern Public Health,” in *The Far-Sighted Gaze of Capital Cities: Essays in Honor of Francesca Bocchi*, ed. Rosa Smurra, Houbert Houben, and Manuela Ghizzoni (Rome, 2014), 307–21.]

⁴² Agramont, *Regiment*, 58.

⁴³ AMV A-2, fol. 12r, and A-21, fol. 164r.

bridges.⁴⁴ Slaughtering, butchering, and the bleeding of animals by veterinarians were also tightly regulated to keep blood, guts, and corpses off the streets.⁴⁵ The council likewise banned throwing rubbish and animal parts into the city's canals, where they could block water flow and create corrupt, stagnant pools.⁴⁶ As mentioned above, during the plague of 1395, the council paid to have the bodies of dead animals removed from the streets of the city. Two years later it created a new office, that of *malaropa*, to collect and dispose of such corpses "and other dead things that ill-mannered people are accustomed to throw in the streets and squares and which bring stench and infection to the city."⁴⁷ In 1503, the council fired a *malaropa*, Pere Ripoll, who "served so badly in his office that the whole city is full of dead cats, dogs, and chickens."⁴⁸

The council was thus engaged throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in public health efforts intended to remove or prevent corruption in the urban space. These efforts were not limited to periods of plague; rather, they predated the Black Death and expanded in the decades that followed. In these years, the council treated plague, like other illnesses, as the result of corruption from the surrounding environment. Corruption sprang from human misbehavior: lazy householders or greedy butchers dumped filth that threatened to infect the whole population. Until the later fifteenth century, therefore, the council's public health strategy was to keep the city on a strict regimen, regularly purging the corruption that accumulated within its boundaries.

MORAL CORRUPTION

Just as the city's best material defense was cleanliness, the best religious defense against plague was moral hygiene. The city council generally combined material and religious responses to natural disaster, but in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a focus on corruption distinguished its religious responses to plague from those to other kinds of crises. The most common religious response to all natural disasters, including plague, was the rogation procession. During some plagues, however, the council supplemented this collective ritual with measures targeting particular sins or sinners. In March of 1395, the council announced that "in the opinion of many" it was the sins of bad legal representatives (*procuradors*) that provoked God to send the current plague.⁴⁹ In July of that year, the council proposed a more comprehensive account of the connection between sin and plague: "And it was proposed and reasoned by some in the present council who understood and believed that, among the other

⁴⁴ AMV A-2, fol. 9v and A-20, fols. 96v-97r.

⁴⁵ AMV A-3, fol. 290r-290v.

⁴⁶ AMV A-1, fol. 189r; A-2, fol. 12r; A-6, fols. 37v, 56v-57v; A-3, fol. 133r.

⁴⁷ AMV I-21, fol. 31r. "una fadri o un prom ab son ase lo qual en los meses de juny juliol agost & setembre de cascun any vaia per les places & carrers de la Ciutat cascu jorn & lleu d'aqui & pose & port sobre son ase cans gats rates nodriment & altres semblants coses mortes que les Gents de mal us solen lançar per les dites places & carrers donant pudor & infecto a la Ciutat," AMV A-21, fol. 121r-121v.

⁴⁸ "En Pere Ripoll serveix mal en lo seu offici de Malaropa com no vulla servir aquell ans tota la ciutat esta plena de gats e goses e gallines mortes per ço revoquen quell del dit offici," AMV A-51, fol. 128r.

⁴⁹ AMV A-20, fol. 215r-215v.

sinner [for] whom divine anger sent the plague of general mortality that is at present in the city, was the sustaining of pimps, bad women, and gamblers, from whom there have been groups of demons. And furthermore, the ugly oaths that common ill-bred people make in many places [naming] the precious body of Jesus Christ and of the sacred Virgin his mother and of other saints of Paradise.”⁵⁰ Here the council drew an association between plague and the most common forms of sexual sin and blasphemy. Gambling and blasphemy were linked, as the process of gaming was thought to encourage blasphemous utterances.⁵¹ These sins, it should be noted, were neither particularly uncommon nor particularly extreme; they were garden-variety corruption, not crimes against nature like treason or sodomy.⁵² During the plague of 1414, the council similarly sought to investigate and punish “public sins . . . as much of carnality as of gaming, from whence follow words of blasphemy to Our Lord for the which, as it is found in Holy Scripture, come pestilential plagues . . . and other public and secret punishments.”⁵³ In order to “mitigate [God’s] wrath, that he send health of body and soul to the earth,” the council appointed worthy men (*prohoms*) to investigate such infractions in each parish. It also entreated the bishop to punish those who fell under his jurisdiction.⁵⁴

The link between plague and these two sets of sins (prostitution and procuring on the one hand; gambling and blasphemy on the other) would persist until the end of the fifteenth century. Again in 1450, plague prompted a set of moral reforms, and once again the targets were “gamblers, blasphemers, swearers, pimps, bad women, and others.”⁵⁵ Seven years later, the council issued an almost identical set of reforms in response to the Naples earthquake of 1457. This was the only disaster outside the kingdom that prompted an official response from the council, even though other earthquakes occurred in the region during this period.⁵⁶ Naples had since 1442 been part of the Crown of Aragon, and King Alfons the Magnanimous (1416–58) was there at the time of the earthquake. The text of the legislation makes clear, moreover, that the quake was of interest to Valencians as a potential source of miasma, which, once released from the depths of the earth, might travel to infect any

⁵⁰ “E com fos proposat & raonat per alguns en lo present Consell que entenien & crehien que entre les altres peccants per los quals la ira divina tremetia la plaga de general mortalitat que de present es en la dita Ciutat era lo sosteniment dalcavots de avols fembres & de tafirs & jugadors dels quals hi hauia stols dels demonis. E aximateix lo letg jurar que les comuns gents mal nodrides fahien de diverses partides no nomenadores del precios cos de Jhu Xrist & de la sagrada verge mare sua & daltres sants & santes de paradís,” AMV A-20, fol. 244r.

⁵¹ A document from 1371 (AMV A-16, fols. 47v–48r) forbids playing cards because the blasphemies uttered in gambling houses anger God.

⁵² These, along with counterfeiting, were the three most serious crimes prosecuted in the city of Valencia. Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, *Malhehores, violencia y justicia ciudadana en la Valencia bajo-medieval (1360–1399)* (Valencia, 1990), 151.

⁵³ “peccats publichs axi de carnalitat com de jochs, don se seguexen paraules de blasfemia a nostre Senyor Deu, per los quals es trobat en la Scriptura Santa que venien plagues, pestilencies, mortaldats, seccades, e altres punicions publicques e secretes,” AMV A-25 fol. 388v.

⁵⁴ “per ço que sia mitigada la sua ira e trameta salut de cos e de anima en la terra,” AMV A-25, fol. 389r. Other documents show that plague was then in the city: AMV A-25, fol. 381r–381v.

⁵⁵ AMV A-35, fol. 19r–19v.

⁵⁶ The Catalan earthquakes of 1427–28, for example, were not commemorated in Valencia. See Antoni Riera i Melis, “Catàstrofe i societat a la Catalunya medieval: Els terratrèmols de 1427–28,” *Acta historica et archaeologica mediaevalia* 20/21 (1999): 699–735.

region.⁵⁷ After giving thanks that the king had survived unscathed, the council noted the need to “extirpate the vices, crimes, and public and most abominable sins that are committed [in Valencia] every day against divine majesty, [so that] our Lord God might be better pleased to guard and preserve this city and kingdom and all the individuals within it from a similar earthquake and *from plagues* and from all persecution and adversity” (emphasis added).⁵⁸

The measures taken in 1457 were along the lines established in 1414 and 1450, but more comprehensive: as “gaming houses [were] schools and temples of cursing God,” they were forbidden in the city, as were betting and blasphemy.⁵⁹ Not only procurers but also frequenters of brothels were banished, and women who consorted with married men were to be designated prostitutes. Women were not to prostitute their daughters, nor men their wives. Notorious prostitutes were banished to the suburbs or the prostitutes’ quarter (the *bordell*), because they “corrupt[ed] good women.” The city’s nuns were not to leave their convents, or to speak to men, and laywomen were not to wear excessively long skirts.⁶⁰ In a letter describing the legislation, the jurats added that the Criminal Justice of the city had apprehended “four very famous madams who had long practiced procurement in their houses.” The previous Monday, the four had been “flogged through the city mounted on asses and with mud on their heads according to the form of the statutes of the city.” God was so pleased with this action, they said, that it rained immediately thereafter, ending a drought.⁶¹ Once more during the plague of 1489 the council passed a set of restrictions on gambling and prostitution, and when the plague continued into the following year, it forbade prostitutes from plying their trade near churches, where they bothered devout Christians and interrupted processions.⁶² Until the last decade of the century, in other words, the catalogue of sins associated with plague was fairly consistent.

Nor was this catalogue coincidental: both gambling and procuring constituted moral corruption. Gambling and prostitution were perennial problems in medieval towns, and moral discussions of them showed ambivalence about the role of money and economic transactions in society.⁶³ In Valencia, both were sins of the

⁵⁷ On earthquakes as a source of plague, see Agramont, *Regiment*, 56–57.

⁵⁸ “extirpar los vicis crims & peccats publichs & molt abhominables que tots jorns se cometen contra la divinal maiestat per que feta correccio de aquells nre senyor deu sia mils placat en guardar & preservar aquesta Ciutat & Regne & tots los singulars daquells de semblant terratremol & de mortaldats & de tota persecucio & adversitat,” AMV A-36, fols. 156v–157r.

⁵⁹ “com experiencia mostre que tafureries son escolles & temples de malahir deu,” AMV A-36, fols. 160v–161r.

⁶⁰ AMV A-36, fol. 160v.

⁶¹ “quatre alcavotes molt affamades las quals havia gran temps usaven de offici d’alcavoteria en lurs cases . . . e lo dilluns ara propassat . . . toltes son estades acotades per la dita Ciutat a cavall en sengles asens e ab allaços al cap segons forma de les ordinacions dela dita Ciutat,” AMV g3-23, fol. 85r.

⁶² The text of the 1489 legislation says that these offenses promoted divine indignation in the form of “mortalities, wars, famines, droughts, earthquake and other tribulations, plagues and persecutions” (“mortaldats, guerres, fams, sequedats, terratremol, e altres greus flagells, plagues, e persecucions”), AMV A-45, fol. 328v. Other documents, however, show that only plague was actually present: AMV A-45, fols. 352v–353v. On prostitutes near churches, see AMV A-45, fols. 388v–389r.

⁶³ Giovanni Ceccarelli, “Gambling and Economic Thought in the Late Middle Ages,” *Ludica: Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco* 12 (2006): 54–63.

immigrant poor. Those who made their living from gambling and prostitution in Valencia tended to be poor and were almost always migrants with limited social networks, the men often former sailors or soldiers left maimed or simply unemployed.⁶⁴ Franciscan writer Francesc Eiximenis, who dedicated his 1384 treatise *Regiment de la cosa pública* to the jurats of Valencia, warned the city's leaders about this group: "as a great part of [the city's population] is not native to here, and is not rich, they are very difficult to rule because they revolt very easily."⁶⁵ City governments across Europe shared these concerns, and historians such as Ann Carmichael and Brian Pullan have observed a growing association between plague and the poor, particularly the criminal poor, in the later fifteenth century.⁶⁶ In Valencia, this association was present from the late fourteenth century on. During the same plague that saw the first moral reform legislation, in 1395, the council also issued its only major set of restrictions on begging, probably inspired by Eiximenis, for whom the "worthless" poor were "like useless limbs on the body . . . that damage the living."⁶⁷

In Valencia, however, the plague's connection with prostitution and gambling proved much more enduring than its connection with begging, which does not appear again in the records. While all three were crimes of the immigrant poor, gambling and prostitution linked this group to the social body as a whole. Professional gamblers and prostitutes may have been marginal, but their customers fit no such profile; they may have included much of the lay male population, including members of the city's ruling families. In this sense, the preoccupation of the Valencian council with gambling and procuring was not only about the dangerous poor; these were sins that implicated society more generally.

As Carole Rawcliffe, Michelle Laughran, and others have shown, urban public health was often understood in the Middle Ages by analogy to the human body, and sexual sins in particular were linked to the physical corruption of that body.⁶⁸ In *Regiment de la cosa pública*, Eiximenis argued that city rulers should forbid "all the professions that corrupt or that provoke evil, like public or professional gamblers, quarrelers, and procurers."⁶⁹ In a sermon on prostitution, Vicent Ferrer quoted Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that a little leaven corrupts the entire dough? . . . Therefore, eject the prostitute into the street, for on her

⁶⁴ Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, *Pueblo, poder y sexo: Valencia medieval (1306–1420)*, Història local 10 (Valencia, 1992), 45.

⁶⁵ "com que gran part de la gent que s'ha mencionat [the population of the city] no és natural d'ací i no és molt rica, result més difícil de regir perquè s'avalota més fàcilment," Francesc Eiximenis, *Regiment de la cosa pública*, ed. Josep Palomero with an introduction by Lluís Brines, Els nostres autors 57 (Alzira, 2009), 57.

⁶⁶ Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, UK, 1986); Brian Pullan, "Plague and Perceptions of the Poor in Early Modern Italy," in *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, ed. Paul Slack and Terence Ranger, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge, UK, 1992), 101–25.

⁶⁷ The anti-begging legislation measure included a grant of 10 florins to Eiximenis for his "many and great works" on behalf of the city, AMV A-20, fols. 244v, 264v–265v; Eiximenis, *Regiment de la cosa pública*, 180–81, 183.

⁶⁸ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 54–56, 110–15; Laughran, "The Body, Public Health and Social Control in Sixteenth-Century Venice" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1998), 9–104.

⁶⁹ "tots els oficis que corrompen o que provoquen el mal, com són els jugadors públics i else jugadors professionals, else renyidors i els alcavots," Eiximenis, *Regiment de la cosa pública*, 190.

account so many plagues have come upon you.”⁷⁰ In other sermons, Ferrer claimed that a single prostitute could corrupt fifty, seventy, or even 120 good women.⁷¹ As Rawcliffe has noted, these authors were not concerned with drawing a distinction between material and spiritual corruption; both had moral weight, and both had health implications for those nearby.

The city of Valencia seems to have been the first city in Iberia to regulate prostitution, and the official bordell, or *pobla de les fembres avols*, is attested from at least 1325.⁷² The containment of prostitutes within this quarter remained an ongoing preoccupation of the council; prostitutes were repeatedly banned from other parts of the city, and the bordell itself was walled off in 1392.⁷³ The jurats proposed to inspect the walls themselves to make sure that they were too high to climb.⁷⁴ Despite all of this, the council never attempted to ban prostitution itself; in Valencia as elsewhere prostitutes were regarded as a sewer through which inappropriate male sexuality could be safely channeled. As such they were a noxious, but necessary, evil that allowed the rest of society to function smoothly.⁷⁵

It was not prostitutes, but rather their pimps, who were offensive to God. Not only did pimps constitute a criminal underclass and prevent prostitutes from repenting their sins, the relationship between pimp and prostitute was a threat to the stability of the family, and thus to the social order. According to Eiximenis, this relationship was a sinful alternative to true marriage, one from which “generation could not occur, as God has ordained.” Sterile and unconsecrated, it could produce neither lineage nor patrimony—the two cornerstones of a stable social order.⁷⁶ Recall that

⁷⁰ Vicent Ferrer, *Sermons*, ed. Gret Schib, vol. 3, *Nostres clàssics / B 6* (Barcelona, 1975), 111–13, quoted in David Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain,” *The American Historical Review* 107/4 (2002): 1070.

⁷¹ Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 89.

⁷² Noelia Rangel López, “Moras, jóvenes y prostitutas: Acerca de la prostitución valenciana a finales de la Edad Media,” *Miscelánea medieval murciana* 32 (2008): 122–23.

⁷³ In 1350, the council ordered both prostitutes and madams to stay out of honest streets, so that they would not be a bad example to good women (AMV A-9, fol. 132v). In 1373, prostitutes were forbidden from working in inns (A-16, fol. 144v). In 1394 and 1398 they were again expelled from other parts of the city and returned to the bordell (AMV A-20, fol. 196v, and A-21, fol. 222r–222v). Starting in 1385, during Holy Week, they were confined to a newly established “home for repentant women” (*casa de les dones de penitencia*), where they were lodged at the city’s expense. Later, funds were allotted for their dowries if they chose to marry (AMV A-18, fol. 80r–80v; A-19, fols. 124v–125r).

⁷⁴ AMV A-20, fol. 27r–27v.

⁷⁵ This sentiment comes originally from Augustine, via Aquinas, who added the image of the sewer. Brian Pullan, *Tolerance, Regulation and Rescue: Dishonoured Women and Abandoned Children in Italy, 1300–1800* (Manchester, MI, 2016), 30. See also Roger Benito Julià, “La prostitución y la alcahuetería en la Barcelona bajomedieval (siglos XIV–XV),” *Miscelánea medieval murciana* 32 (2008): 9–21.

⁷⁶ “no es puga segui generació entre ells, així com Déu ho ha ordenat.” Eiximenis, *Lo crestià: Selecció*, ed. Albert Hauf (Barcelona, 1983), 213, quoted in Narbona Vizcaíno, *Pueblo, poder y sexo*, 153. On marriage see also Eiximenis, *Regiment de la cosa pública*, 195–96. The sterility of prostitutes was a trope of medieval moral writing; Karras has observed that male ecclesiastics were probably unaware of an oral tradition of contraceptive methods, and blamed sterility on excessive fornication. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK, 2012), 137. Pimps also competed for control of prostitutes with municipally licensed brothel keepers (*hostalers*), from whom the city collected revenue. Eukene Lacarra Lanz, “Legal and Clandestine Prostitution in Medieval Spain,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 79/3 (2002), 269; Narbona Vizcaíno, *Pueblo, poder y sexo*, 175.

in the reforms instituted after the Naples earthquake, the distinction between prostitute and mistress was erased, and procuring was forbidden within families. These measures were intended to separate prostitution and procurement from family relationships; blurring these boundaries threatened society as a whole.

Gambling was likewise a sin of corruption; while prostitution threatened honest women and honest marriage, gambling corrupted men, leading them into further sin. Professional gamblers tended to come from the same marginal, immigrant class as pimps; the council was chiefly concerned about their effect on the good citizens and their sons who frequented gambling houses.⁷⁷ Medieval theologians were divided on the extent to which gambling was considered sinful.⁷⁸ For the council of Valencia, it damaged the public good not only because of the “many blasphemies . . . that [were] said against God, and the Virgin Mary his mother, and other saints of paradise,” but also because “many persons of diverse ages including the sons of citizens of the city . . . ruin themselves and lose their goods.”⁷⁹ Gambling, in other words, wasted the patrimony on which the family and lineage depended.

Both prostitution and gambling, therefore, were sins practiced by marginal people that implicated the whole of society and threatened to corrupt the social fabric. Both were fairly widespread and innocuous sins, which nonetheless had troubling implications when practiced on a larger scale. Although the sins that caused plague were those of the immigrant poor, the council’s account of the association between plague and these particular sins involved the pillars of society as well as those on its margins. Rather than blaming the plague on a few people who had committed a heinous crime, the council described it as the result of routine corruption that, unchecked, had spread to threaten the social body. The council’s account of the spiritual causes of plague, in other words, was directly analogous to its account of the material causes: gamblers, prostitutes, and procurers were for the council the equivalent of trash or filth left to corrupt in the public space. This account of plague persisted through generations of councilmen and was distinct from those for other types of disaster. While droughts, floods, and locusts prompted only vaguely worded calls for penitence, the council consistently associated plague with sins of corruption that threatened the moral health of the city.

CONTAGION PRACTICE

The association between plague and corruption in Valencia continued through the end of the fifteenth century. However, starting in the 1450s and accelerating in the 1470s, the council also began to treat plague as contagious, moving not on the wind but between the bodies and belongings of human beings. Concepts of contagion appear in medical texts throughout the medieval period, and from 1348 on

⁷⁷ Vizcaíno, *Pueblo, poder y sexo*, 39.

⁷⁸ Ceccarelli, “Gambling and Economic Thought in the Late Middle Ages,” 54–63.

⁷⁹ “E aquelles redundar en gran offensa de la divinal majestat per moltes blasfemies que en les dites tafureries & jochs se dien contra Deu & la Verge Nostra Dona Santa Maria mare sua & altres sants de parais. Redundar encara en gran dampnatge de la cosa publica per moltes persones de diverses edats axi fills dels habitants de la dita Ciutat com altres quis enaulien es desfahien de lurs bens es perdien per occasio daytal escola viciosa,” AMV A-16, fols. 47v–48r.

most plague treatises, including that of Jacme d'Agramont, cited contagion as one of many factors in the spread of plague.⁸⁰ Contagion could coexist with other types of causation; just as disease was a putrefaction within the body caused by corrupted air, this same putrefaction corrupted the breath and made each individual a miniature source of miasma.⁸¹

Before the mid-fifteenth century there was no trace of contagion theory in the plague prevention efforts of the Valencian city council. Although the council was aware that plague could move, and could arrive in the city from elsewhere, it was, as we have seen, primarily concerned with corruption arising from the city itself.⁸² But starting in the mid-fifteenth century and particularly from the 1470s on, the council began to treat plague as a hazard that was carried to the city in the bodies and goods of travelers. Plague was now understood first and foremost as an external threat, and plague response therefore required emergency defense rather than regular, internal cleansing. Theories of corruption and contagion were not necessarily in conflict; the council in the later fifteenth century shifted its prevention strategy, but not its overall concept of disease causation. This shift was, however, significant, as it created a sharp rupture in the council's official responses to plague.

Contagion appeared first in a royal edict of 1440. Queen Maria (1416–58), acting as regent during the absence of King Alfons in Naples, prohibited infected foreigners from entering the city, because “experience has clearly shown all pestilential illness to be contagious, and that persons having the pestilence have been the principle and cause of the sudden appearance of great mortalities in diverse cities and towns.” For this reason, “any stranger of any condition or standing who feels in himself or has the pestilence” was not to enter the city by day or night. Any inhabitants of the city who harbored such a person would find all of their goods forfeited to the queen, and the infected person would be expelled. Any medical practitioner who knew of plague and did not divulge it to the jurats within one day faced a similar penalty.⁸³ Ten years later, in 1450, the council itself issued a similar proclamation. Once again, “experience shows and has manifestly shown the pestilential sickness to be contagious, and in consequence all communion with those who are touched with this illness is to be avoided.” This time, however, the ban on strangers applied not only to the sick but also to whoever had come in the last month “from

⁸⁰ Arrizabalaga, “Facing the Black Death,” 259–64, and Stearns, *Infectious Ideas*, 91–96. On the challenges of placing contagion within classical medical theory, see Carmichael, “Contagion Theory,” 225–30; Melissa P. Chase, “Fever, Poisons, and Apostemes: Authority and Experience in Montpellier Plague Treatises,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 441/1 (1985): 162–63; and Vivian Nutton, “The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance,” *Medical History* 27/1 (1983): 1–34.

⁸¹ Annemarie Kinzelbach, “Infection, Contagion, and Public Health Late Medieval and Early Modern German Imperial Towns,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 61/3 (2006): 369–89.

⁸² In November 1370, for example, the council ordered a procession to be held to pray that God lift the plague currently ravaging Catalonia, and that it not spread to the city or kingdom of Valencia, AMV A-15, fols. 143v–144r.

⁸³ “com experiencia assats clara haia mostrat tot mal pestilencial esser contagios e que per sobrevenir en algunes Ciutat viles e lochs personses havents mal de pestilencia han donat principi e causa en diverses Ciutat viles & lochs d grans mortalitats,” AMV A-32, fol. 191r.

a place where they are dying of pestilence, in particular the city and kingdom of Mallorca, and the towns of Gandia, Denia and Xàbia.”⁸⁴

Following this edict, the council let the idea of contagion drop for more than two decades.⁸⁵ Only in 1476 did the jurats again announce that:

As it pertains to their office to provide for the good rule, conservation and health of the City and its inhabitants, as much as pertains to human providence, first commending all things to divine . . . providence, from which all good and grace descends to us, and knowing that experience has shown many times that the pestilence and plague is initiated and caused in the present City (Our Lord God having permitted it) by the coming, taking in, and receiving in the city and in the suburbs, houses, and gardens near and around it of persons sick or infected with plague coming from some pestilent places by sea or by land, from which cause follows great and inestimable damage to the city.⁸⁶

For this reason, no sick persons were to be received in the city, nor was anyone to harbor them within the walls. Furthermore, no one from the infected cities and towns was to be admitted, “even if they show themselves to be healthy,” until they had been forty days in places free from plague. Those bringing food supplies to the city were exempt from this ban; they merely had to show themselves not to be ill. The dead, however, were not exempt; no one was to bring “corpses of men or women who died of the pestilence within the city walls to bury them, because the infection of corpses is much worse and produces greater infection than that of the sick or other living persons infected with the pestilence.” Such corpses were to be buried outside the walls for six months before being moved into the city.⁸⁷ Finally, all but five of the

⁸⁴ “com experiència mostre & haia mostrat manifestament lo mal de pestilència esser contagios e per consegüent deures squivar tota comunio de aquells qui de tal malaltia son tocats pertal los dits honorables justic jurats & Consell per benefici dl poble de la dita Ciutat manen intime & notifique que no sia person alguna de quantaque dignitat condicio o stament sia que vinga de loch on se muyren de pestilència specialment dla Ciutat e Regne de Mallorca de vila de Gandia de la vila de Denia e del loch de Xabea gos o presumesca entrar dins la Ciutat de Valentia ravals & lochs circumvehins de aquella,” AMV A-35, fol. 39v.

⁸⁵ During this time, there was plague in the city at least three times: in 1459, 1460, and 1466–67.

⁸⁶ “com se pertanga al offici de aquells proveir en lo bon regiment, conservacio, e salut de la dita Ciutat e dels singulars habitants en aquella en quant per human providencia se pot dispondre, Remettent principalment totes les coses a la providencia, directio, e adiutori divinal del qual tots los bens e gracies devallen en nosaltres. E advertint aquells com experiència ha mostrat moltes vegades que la pestilència e mortalitat es stada principiada e causada en la present Ciutat permetent ho axi nostre Senyor Deu per occasio de venir, acollir, e receptar en la present ciutat e en los Ravals, cases, e orths propinchs e circumstants a aquella, persones malalts o infectes de pestilència venints de algunes parts pestilents per mar o per terra per la qual causa se son seguits grands e inextimables dans a la present Ciutat e al be publich d’aquella en general e en particular,” AMV A-40, fols. 254r–255v. This *crida* is published and analyzed in Mercedes Gallent Marco and José María Barnardo Paniagua, “Comunicación en tiempo de peste: ‘Les crides’ en la Valencia del XV,” *Saitabi: Revista de la Facultat de geografia i història* 51–52 (2001): 113–36.

⁸⁷ “Molt pus stretament ordenen e manen que no sien mesos o aportats dins los murs de la dita Ciutat cosos alguns de homens o dones morts de la pestilència per a soterrar aquella per quant la infectio dels cosos morts es maior e pot produyr maiors infections que dels malalts o altres persones vives e infectes dela dita pestilència,” AMV A-40 255v. For another possible instance of postmortem contagion, see Rollo-Koster, “Failed Ritual?,” 27–53.

city gates were to be closed, and trustworthy guards posted to observe the ordinances.⁸⁸ According to chronicler Melcior Miralles, the guards “asked those who came to Valencia under oath whether they came from places of mortality,” but there is no indication that they made plague diagnoses.⁸⁹

Restrictions similar to those of 1476 accompanied each subsequent outbreak of plague.⁹⁰ From this point onward, the city’s public health response was focused on keeping the infected out of the city. This shift occurred on the city council’s own initiative but was also part of a broader trend toward quarantine measures elsewhere in the western Mediterranean, which accompanied a growing medical consensus on the contagious nature of plague.⁹¹ The new focus on contagion did not constitute a novel theory of disease; it was instead a layering of new priorities over the old.⁹² The fight against miasma now focused on the bodies of outsiders rather than on corruption in the city. Hygienic efforts remained in the background but received significantly less attention; by 1508, the council complained that the streets of the city had become filthy and full of trash “because of the depopulation of the city on account of the pestilence.”⁹³ By then, Valencia’s council and prominent citizens routinely fled the city during plagues, a practice that seems to have begun shortly after the adoption of quarantine.⁹⁴

Although the adoption of quarantine and related anticontagion measures was long hailed as a milestone in the history of public health, some historians of medicine

⁸⁸ AMV A-40 255v-256r.

⁸⁹ “enterrogasen en sagrament los que venien a València si venien dels lochs de mortalitat,” Miralles, *Dietari del capellà* 4.798, 444.

⁹⁰ For similar regulations during subsequent outbreaks of plague: 1477: AMV A-41, fol. 9v; 1481: A-42, fols. 102r-103r; 1483: A-43, fols. 108v-109r and fols. 132v-134v; 1485: A-44, fol. 109r-109v; 1487: A-45, fols. 10v-11v; 1489: A-45, fols. 281v-282r; 1491: A-46, fol. 87v; 1494: A-48, fols. 6v-7r; 1495: A-48, fols. 212r-214r; 1501: A-50, fols. 509v-510r; 1507: A-53, fols. 301v-302v; 1508: A-53, fol. 464v; 1509: A-54, fols. 14v-15r; 1510: A-54, fols. 30v-31r; 1515: A-56, fol. 294v; 1518: A-57, fol. 862r-862v; 1519: A-58, fols. 343r-344v. The 1483 regulations are published and analyzed in Jaume Josep Chiner Gimeno, “Prevenición y peste en la Valencia del siglo XV: Unas ordenanzas de 1483,” in 1490: *En el umbral de la modernidad; El Mediterráneo europeo y las ciudades en el tránsito de los siglos XV-XVI*, ed. José Ramon Hinojosa Montalvo and Jesús Pradells Nadal, vol. 2, *Monografías del Consell Valencià de Cultura* 16 (Valencia, 1994), 25-33.

⁹¹ Blažina Tomić and Blažina, *Expelling the Plague*; Jane Stevens Crawshaw, “The Renaissance Invention of Quarantine,” in *Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. Linda Clark and Carole Rawcliffe, *Fifteenth Century* 12 (Woodbridge, UK, 2013), 161-74; Pullan, “Plague and Perceptions of the Poor,” 112-13; Carmichael, “Contagion Theory,” 213, 221-32; and Ann G. Carmichael, “Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 57/4 (1983): 508-25. More locally, the first trade and travel ban in Lleida was put into effect in 1457. Roca Cabau, “Medidas municipales contra la peste,” 37.

⁹² See Nutton, “The Seeds of Disease,” 1-34, and Carmichael, “Contagion Theory.”

⁹³ “speriencia se mostre les tantes y tan grans inmundicies, fems, draps e altres brutedats que per la dita ciutat, carrers plases, e carrerons de aquella son e aço causa de la despoblacio de la dita ciutat per causa de la pestilencia,” AMV A-54, fol. 4r. In contrast, health boards in Turin and Seville put in new urban filth control measures during plague; see Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and Their Motives in Turin, 1541-1789* (Cambridge, UK, 1995), 49; Bowers, *Plague and Public Health*, 33-34.

⁹⁴ Although individuals were absent from the council during plagues throughout the fifteenth century, the whole council met outside the city for the first time in 1490, “because some gentlemen did not want to enter into the city” on account of the plague. AMV A-46, fol. 7r.

have been skeptical about whether quarantines, of whole towns or of individuals, were effective at stopping the spread of plague.⁹⁵ There is some reason to doubt their effectiveness in Valencia. The 1476 quarantine was imposed at the end of an epidemic that, according to Miralles, had already been raging for ten months.⁹⁶ Food imports were entirely exempt from quarantine, although, as Aaron Shakow has noted, grain shipments were by far the most likely vehicle for infected rats.⁹⁷

Alongside the shift to quarantine, the council developed a new interest in isolating the city's poor. Historians of late medieval and early modern plagues have long noted an increasing focus on the poor as plague carriers in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁹⁸ In May of 1494, the council for the first time distributed funds to deal with the poor during a plague; the money was to be used for "guards . . . nails and iron bars to close the doors of the houses of those persons who have died of plague."⁹⁹ The council later allotted funds for medical care, and by 1509 had a temporary lazaretto in a rented farmhouse on the port road. This ad hoc arrangement continued for another ten years; not until 1519 did the council purchase a plague house of its own.¹⁰⁰

What prompted the council to shift focus to contagion? When Queen Maria imposed the first "trade and travel" ban in Valencia in 1440, King Alfons had been in Italy for several years, engaged in the conquest of Naples. Such bans had been commonplace in Italy since the 1420s. The first ban was therefore likely a result of Italian influence, but it took another generation before the Valencian council adopted the practice wholeheartedly. In making this shift, the Valencian council was probably not running ahead of local medical consensus, which would have accepted contagion as a mechanism of plague transmission.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the bans' emphasis on "experience" may refer to the shifting priorities of the city's medical community. In the late fifteenth century, the academic study of medicine was beginning to flourish in Valencia, a process that would culminate in the founding of the university (Estudi General)

⁹⁵ See, for example, Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 10; Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, 47. On the other side of the issue see Blažina Tomić and Blažina, *Expelling the Plague*, 44–46.

⁹⁶ Miralles, *Dietari del capellà* 3.32. Rubio Vela concurs with this chronology. Rubio Vela, "Las epidemias de peste en la ciudad de Valencia durante el siglo XV: Nuevas aportaciones," *Estudis castel·lonencs* 6 (1994–1995), 1212.

⁹⁷ Aaron Shakow, "Marks of Contagion: The Plague, the Bourse, the Word and the Law in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1720–1762" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009), 54.

⁹⁸ Both Pullan and Carmichael have argued that quarantine and the flight of the rich from plague cities contributed to a growing association between plague and poverty. See note 64.

⁹⁹ "per a claus e fferraduras per tancar les portes de les cases de algunes persones que se son mortes de peste," AMV A-48, fol. 25r.

¹⁰⁰ For medical care, see AMV A-48, fols. 67v–68r, 86v–87r. For the rental and then purchase of a plague house, see AMV A-58, fol. 586r, and A-59, fol. 148v.

¹⁰¹ Carmichael proposed that health officials in Milan had accepted contagion before physicians did ("Contagion Theory") but has since revised her opinion somewhat: see Carmichael, "Epidemics and State Medicine," 221–47. On Valencian physicians' acceptance of contagion, see Roger French and Jon Arrizabalaga, "Coping with the French Disease: University Practitioners' Strategies and Tactics in the Transition from the Fifteenth to the Sixteenth Century," in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. French, Arrizabalaga, Cunningham, and García-Ballester, 267–73.

at the turn of the sixteenth century.¹⁰² In the 1470s, a new medical establishment was on the rise, focused on the newly established College of Surgery (*Escola de Cirurgia*). In 1478, the king granted this college the right to perform dissections, so they might “see, know, communicate, and prove with their own eyes those things occluded and hidden in earthly bodies.” García-Ballester considered this the dawn in Valencia of a new medical methodology that privileged visible reality over received wisdom.¹⁰³ An emphasis on quarantine as the wisdom of “experience” may have been part of that shift. A central figure in this medical community, Lluís Alcanyís, later composed a treatise on plague, written in 1489 and printed in Valencia in the first months of 1490. In this treatise he warns against “communication with infected people and those who come from an infected place, for which cause, as it has been seen, many cities and towns come to great ruin, as is proved by long experience.”¹⁰⁴

The council’s sudden enthusiasm for quarantine might also have owed something to the contemporary political climate. In 1476, the Catalan civil war had just drawn to a close, and the king of Aragon was embroiled in a border conflict with France, while Castile was still engaged in its own civil strife. This may, therefore, have been a moment when the fear of the outside world was great enough to justify the economic cost of disrupting trade.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the impetus, however, the council shifted decisively in 1475 from a public health strategy of eliminating corruption within the city to one focused on contagion coming from outside. And just as the focus on corruption had been both material and religious, the new focus on contagion permeated all aspects of the council’s response to plague.

CONTAGION PIETY

While the shift to contagion practice, particularly the growing use of quarantine, is well documented in Italy and elsewhere, there has been little study of the effect of this shift on religious understandings of disease. In Valencia, new rituals accompanied the adoption of quarantine. Just as religious responses in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries had addressed moral corruption within the urban body, the rituals of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries sought to protect the city from external threat. Civic ritual responses to plague, in other

¹⁰² On prominent Valencians in the medical schools of Italy in the later fifteenth century, see Jon Arrizabalaga, Luis García-Ballester, and Fernando Salmón, “A propósito de las relaciones intelectuales entre la Corona de Aragón e Italia (1470–1520): Los estudiantes de medicina valencianos en los estudios generales de Siena, Pisa, Ferrara y Padua,” *Dynamis: Acta hispanica ad medicinae scientiarumque historiam illustrandam* 9 (1989): 117–47.

¹⁰³ “poder veure, saber tractar e provehir per los propis ulls aquelles coses ocultes e amagades dins los cossos mundanals,” Luis García-Ballester, *La medicina a la València medieval: Medicina i societat en un país medieval mediterrani*, Descubrim el País Valencià 29 (Valencia, 1988): 59–60.

¹⁰⁴ “comunicar ab gents infectes e que vinguen de loch infecte, com se sia vist per tal ocasió moltes ciutats e viles venir en gran ruyna, segons se comprova per larges experiències,” Lluís Alcanyís, *Regiment preservatiu e curatiu de la pestilència*, ed. Antoni Ferrando (Valencia, 1999), 147.

¹⁰⁵ On that cost in early modern Seville, see Kristy Wilson Bowers, “Balancing Individual and Communal Needs: Plague and Public Health in Early Modern Seville,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 81/2 (2007): 335–58.

words, were no more static or traditional than public health measures against epidemic disease.

During the epidemic of 1475–76, when the council adopted quarantine as its main plague prevention measure, it also experimented with the format of the rogation procession. As noted above, the rogation procession was the most common form of religious response to disaster, and its form remained more or less constant through the fourteenth and much of the fifteenth centuries. The council declared and funded these processions, which it organized jointly with the cathedral chapter.¹⁰⁶ The entire Christian population was enjoined to gather in the cathedral, from where they processed through the streets to another church or monastery and back again. Led by the clergy, members of the lay population were to be attired “honestly,” to carry candles in their hands, and to walk “without crowding or speaking to one another, praying in the name of God and the Virgin Mary and all the saints that they intervene on the city’s behalf with the Holy Trinity.”¹⁰⁷ Even when several were held in quick succession, the council did not announce the processions as a formal sequence, nor did the order of destinations follow any clear pattern. They also did not feature relics or holy images, as was common in other cities.¹⁰⁸

In 1475, however, the council declared two series of processions for plague relief. The first, announced on 17 July consisted of “four processions on four consecutive days . . . passing through the whole city.” Each procession was to visit three of the city’s twelve parishes, in the East, West, North, and South respectively.¹⁰⁹ Two weeks later, the council declared a second set of processions, which would go to each of the city’s four main gates and at each gate affix “an image and figure of the holy guardian angel of the city.”¹¹⁰ For the first time, processions formed a sequence that held symbolic meaning: marking off and sanctifying the boundaries of the city. The first procession traced a sacred topography across all twelve parishes, even though the majority of Valencian rogation processions were directed to larger

¹⁰⁶ No records survive of the cathedral chapter’s part in organizing these processions. Given that the council funded them, it may be presumed that the council members had a deciding voice. This is particularly likely because the see of Valencia was held by absentee bishops (the Borja family) from 1432 through the mid-sixteenth century.

¹⁰⁷ “tot crestia & xristiana que vaia enla dita proceso uaiia honestemnet & ab vestidures honestes sens parlar uns ab altres ne donaise presure mas tantsolament loan & pregar lo nom de deu & de la verge mare sui & als sants de paradís que les placia esser intercessors entre la santa trinitat,” AMV A-4, fol. 179r.

¹⁰⁸ On customs in Barcelona, see Mariano Barriendos Vallvé and Javier Martín-Vide, “The Use of Rogation Ceremony Records in Climatic Reconstruction: A Case Study from Catalonia (Spain),” *Climatic Change* 30/2 (1995): 201–21.

¹⁰⁹ The first procession went to the parish church of Sant Tomas, the chapels of Santa Maria de Misericordia and Sant Vicent Ferrer in the Dominican convent, and passed by Sant Joan del Spital on its way to the parish church of Sant Esteve. The second went to the parish churches of Sant Lorent, Santa Creu, and Sant Bartomeu. The third went to the parish churches of Sant Nicolau, Sant Joan del Mercat, and Santa Caterina. The fourth went to the parish church of Sant Andreu, the monastery of Santa Maria del Merce, and the church of Sant Marti. AMV A-40, fols. 216v–217r.

¹¹⁰ AMV A-40, fols. 216v–218r. Chronicler Melcior Miralles noted that the images were “painted solemnly on wood,” and consecrated by the auxiliary bishop before being mounted on the gates: “En lo dit any.LXXV., per los senyors regidós de València feren fer quatre angels, pintats sobre fusta solempnament.” Miralles, *Dietari del capellà* 4.768.

monastic sites.¹¹¹ In the second, the images of the guardian angel played a protective role, analogous to that of the guards who were, a few months later, stationed at the same gates to deny entry to outsiders.

This same summer saw the first uses of saints' relics in a Valencian rogation procession. On 25 August and again on 4 September, the council announced that it would seek relief from the plague with the help of the "most illustrious and blessed Saint Louis, son of the most serene King Charles of Great Sicily of immortal memory."¹¹² The body of bishop Louis of Anjou had been brought to the city after the Valencian sack of Marseilles in 1423, but neither his relics nor any others were used in Valencian rogation processions before 1475.¹¹³ During the next few decades, processions with relics became more common in Valencia. The council organized another series of three (with the head of Saint Louis, the leg bone of Saint Vicent Ferrer, and the *Lignum Crucis*) during the plague 1489–90, and a further three during the plague of 1494.¹¹⁴ It also began to organize more processions dedicated to saints traditionally associated with plague. In 1489, a procession was organized to the recently constructed extramural church of Sant Sebastià.¹¹⁵ In 1494, the council declared that the feast of Santa Anna (26 July) would be celebrated, "because at many other times it has been seen that plagues in the city were mitigated by the great merit of the said Santa Anna."¹¹⁶ In 1508, 26 July was again declared a holiday because "experience has shown [that] the plague often ceases on the feast of Santa Anna."¹¹⁷ In 1519, the council organized a procession for the health of the city to Sant Sebastià in celebration of the feast of the "glorious doctors" (*gloriosos metges*) Cosmas and Damian.¹¹⁸ It further specified that this feast would be celebrated every year from then on.¹¹⁹

Such rituals, dedicated to saints who had in the past proved effective, have been documented in previous studies of Iberian civic piety, using mostly sixteenth-century records.¹²⁰ The assumption has been that while the records are recent,

¹¹¹ By far the most popular destination for rogation processions was the chapel of Santa Maria de Gràcia in the convent of Sant Agostí. The convent of Santa Maria del Carme and the chapel of Santa Maria de la Misericòrdia in the Dominican convent were also popular, as was the monastery of the Trinity across the river.

¹¹² "lo illustrissim e beneventurat Sent Lois fill del Serenmo Rey Karles de la Gran Sicilia de immortal memoria," AMV A-40, fol. 221v.

¹¹³ Holly J. Grieco, "In Some Way Even More than Before': Approaches to Understanding St. Louis of Anjou, Franciscan Bishop of Toulouse," in *Center and Periphery: Studies on Power in the Medieval World in Honor of William Chester Jordan*, ed. Katherine L. Jansen, G. Geltner, and Anne E. Lester, Later Medieval Europe 11 (Boston, 2013), 135–56.

¹¹⁴ AMV A-45, fols. 387v–388r; A-48, fols. 64r–65v, 68r–69r, 70r–71r.

¹¹⁵ AMV A-45, fol. 353r–353v.

¹¹⁶ "per que en altre temps recorrent la dita gloriosa senta ana per sos grans merits es stat vist la peste que era en la present Ciutat esser stada mitigada & del tot extinta," AMV A-48, fols. 71r–72v.

¹¹⁷ "per speriencia es stat vist sobrevenint la festa de la gloriosa Senta Anna cessar la pestilencia," AMV A-54, fol. 4v. Dormeier has noted Saint Anne's popularity as a plague saint around 1500. Dormeier, "Saints as Protectors," 169.

¹¹⁸ On Cosmas and Damian as plague saints, see Dormeier, "Saints as Protectors," 169.

¹¹⁹ AMV A-58, fols. 539v–540r.

¹²⁰ See Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, and more recently a number of studies using rogation ceremonies as environmental proxies, including Martín-Vide and Barriendos, "The Use of Rogation Ceremony Records," 201–21; Mariano Barriendos, "Climate Change in the Iberian

the practices remained unchanged from previous centuries. In Valencia, however, the records start early enough to make it clear that evidence of use of relics and saints for disaster relief appears rather suddenly in the later fifteenth century. The practices may have existed earlier, but not under the sponsorship of the city council. The council used them, moreover, mostly for plague, rather than other disasters.¹²¹

It seems reasonable, therefore, to posit an association between the protective rituals the council organized in the summer of 1475 and the protective measures it instituted at the end of the same epidemic in the spring of 1476. The adoption of quarantine practices as protection against plague, in other words, was in Valencia connected to the adoption of protective religious rituals against plague. The chronology is such that it would be difficult (and perhaps unhelpful) to say that one inspired the other; quarantine appeared in the city first, in 1440, but without lasting effect, and during the 1475–76 plague, protective religious rituals were organized months before quarantine was imposed. Around 1475, all civic responses to plague, material and religious, underwent a shift from purification to protection.

Neither side of this shift is, in and of itself, remarkable; Valencia was by no means the first medieval city to impose quarantine or to seek saintly protection from the plague. But in Valencia, the council's medical and ritual practices both shifted at the same time. Municipal plague rituals were not static, ancient practices; rather, they evolved as understandings of plague changed. Quarantine, traditionally considered the forerunner of a modern, rational approach to medicine, was in fact part of the same shift that inspired rituals of protection, long considered among the most ancient rituals in the church.¹²² Historians of medicine have been chipping away at quarantine's modernity for some years, but the primitive nature of disaster rituals has remained largely unchallenged.¹²³ More research is necessary to determine if similar shifts occurred in the ritual practice of other cities as they adopted quarantine measures. In Valencia, at least, protective rituals and quarantine formed part of a unified set of plague responses, just as measures against moral and material corruption had in earlier decades.

Although the Valencian city council had by the end of the fifteenth century transformed its approach to plague, the population as a whole did not necessarily share this new focus on protection over purification. Popular preachers continued to link disaster and sin. In early 1476, as the city faced not only the plague but also heavy

Peninsula: Indicator of Rogation Ceremonies (16th–19th centuries),” *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 57/3 (2010): 131–59; Fernando Domínguez-Castro et al., “Reconstruction of Drought Episodes for Central Spain from Rogation Ceremonies Recorded at the Toledo Cathedral from 1506–1900: A Methodological Approach,” *Global and Planetary Change* 63 (2008): 234. Diana Webb describes similar rituals in her account of saint veneration in Italian cities, but before 1450 the crises she cites are all political rather than environmental in nature. Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City-states*, International Library of Historical Studies 4 (London, 1996), 198–231. Rawcliffe observed similarly “talismanic” uses of religious symbols in English towns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 90–94.

¹²¹ The head and body of Saint Louis of Anjou were also used in three drought processions, in 1481, 1485, and 1506: AMV A-42, fol. 103r–103v; A-44, fol. 108v; A-52, fols. 164r–165r.

¹²² Discussions of late medieval rogation processions generally cite Bishop Mamertus of Vienne, who instituted the celebration of Rogation Days in 474, or Pope Gregory the Great's call for processions against plague in 590. See, for example, Andrew Brown, “Devotion and Emotion: Creating the Devout Body in Late Medieval Bruges,” *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 1/2 (2012): 228 n. 13.

¹²³ For critiques of quarantine, see note 94, as well as Carmichael, “Contagion Theory.”

rains, a Dominican friar named Agostí Ferrandis preached that humans would soon see a “universal sign” of God’s anger at their sins. This sign might take the form of flood, fire, or earthquake, and would be “so horrible that many people will die of fright.”¹²⁴ In the early 1490s, a well-known mystic named Tecla Servent recounted visions in which God threatened to send plagues and wars to destroy the world on account of the sins of the clergy, particularly sodomy.¹²⁵ In 1519, a Dominican preacher named Lluís de Castellolí blamed the plague’s onset on city officials, whose laxness in prosecuting sin had angered God. As reported in the municipal chronicle, Castellolí revealed that he had heard of “a most abominable sin . . . certain persons [in the city] were practicing the sin of sodomy.” He had, he said, advised municipal officials of this, but they had done nothing, “for which God was greatly offended.” Hearing this indictment, “the people began to murmur,” and the Criminal Justice of the city soon seized and burned several accused sodomites. Among those arrested was a baker who fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Valencia. He was not, therefore, condemned to death, and the following Sunday Castellolí once again preached about God’s anger against a city “that had not executed and burned such a public sinner.” A riot ensued, and a mob seized the baker from ecclesiastical custody and burned him alive in the Plaça del Tossal.¹²⁶

Contemporaries recorded this incident of civil unrest as the beginning of the Revolt of the Brotherhoods that was to convulse the kingdom of Valencia the following year.¹²⁷ Accounts agree that the riot in the summer of 1519 was successful only because, due to the plague, barely any municipal officials remained in the city.¹²⁸ This, the only clear instance of plague-motivated violence in Valencia, occurred more or less in the absence of city officials. It also occurred well after the council itself had ceased to associate plague with specific sinners. As a preacher, Castellolí would have had priorities different from those of the city council, and these are clear in his account of the plague. Unlike the moral reforms of previous generations of councilmen, Castellolí linked plague to a much graver sin that implicated far fewer people. Sodomy was by the early sixteenth century closely associated with sexual deviance in Iberian political discourse, although it had never appeared in the official civic accounts of plague.¹²⁹ Francesc Eiximenis’s thoughts on the association between sodomy and disease also reached a much wider audience in the

¹²⁴ Miralles, *Dietari del capellà* 4.786–97. Ronald E. Surtz, “Gender and Prophecy in Late Medieval Valencia,” *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 41/1 (2012): 299–302.

¹²⁵ Surtz, “Gender and Prophecy,” 302–15.

¹²⁶ Salvador Carreres Zacarés, ed., *Libre de memòries de diversos sucesos e fets memorables e de coses senyalades de la ciutat e regne de Valencia (1308–1644)*, vol. 2 (Valencia, 1935), 779–81.

¹²⁷ On this revolt, see Ricardo García Cárcel, *Las germanías de Valencia*, 2nd ed., *Historia, ciencia y sociedad* 119 (Barcelona, 1981), and Vicent J. Vallés Borràs, *La Germanía*, *Arxius i documents* 29 (Valencia, 2000).

¹²⁸ See, for example, Joaquim Martí Mestre, ed., *El “Libre de Antiquitats” de la Seu de València*, vol. 1, *Biblioteca Sanchis Guarner* 30–31 (Valencia, 1994), 58, fols. 21v–22r.

¹²⁹ Thomas Devaney, “Virtue, Virility, and History in Fifteenth-Century Castile,” *Speculum* 88/3 (2013): 721–49; Barbara Weissberger, ““¡A tierra, puto!”: Alfonso de Palencia’s Discourse of Effeminacy,” in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hucheson (Durham, NC, 1999), 291–324, as well as the other essays in that volume.

early sixteenth century, after his *Llibre de les dones* was printed in Barcelona in 1495.¹³⁰ Castellolí's account of plague was more of an inflammatory indictment of social mores than any official government response had been, perhaps because he was far less concerned about maintaining public order. For him, as for most preachers, the cause of plague as a scourge of God mattered more than its social consequences. For generations of councilmen, however, plagues were different from floods, droughts, locusts, or earthquakes: not only in their material effects, but in the religious response they demanded from the population.

CONCLUSION

Medieval Valencians did not understand all disasters in the same way, and were not necessarily looking for someone to blame. The city council interpreted droughts, floods, and swarms of locusts as matters of collective responsibility, in both religious and material terms. Because plague was understood as the result of corruption, it was linked to the sins of corruption that preoccupied the rulers of the city. These sins were the everyday sins of urban life, the moral equivalent of stagnant puddles or filth on the streets, and threatened the health of the social body only when left unattended. By the later fifteenth century, however, the council adopted a new understanding of plague, one that located danger in the bodies of those coming into the city. As the council's medical approach to plague shifted, its religious approach changed as well, moving from a focus on purification to one of protection from threat.

Some years ago, Peregrine Horden argued for the incorporation of ritual into the history of premodern public health with reference to an observation of Arthur Maurice Hocart: "a temple is as useful as a dam."¹³¹ In this same vein, other historians of public health have demonstrated that a dam (that is, a quarantine) could be as useless, or as symbolic, as a temple.¹³² This article has sought to refine that observation by demonstrating that the temples and dams of Valencian public health were built and rebuilt together, and functioned according to the same principles. Quarantine, therefore, ought to be understood not as a secularization of plague response but as part of a shift in focus, both medical and religious, from cleansing to protection from external threat. The introduction of quarantine was associated in Valencia with processions around the city walls, the use of relics, and special pleas to patron saints that were newly part of the city's disaster response. Neither a focus on corruption nor a focus on contagion was more modern, more rational, or indeed more humane than the other, and neither can be said to be primarily material or primarily religious. Blame for plague was a matter both moral and environmental; both corruption and contagion spread plague through natural processes compounded by human misdeeds, and both served as metaphors for imagining a society under threat.

¹³⁰ Eiximenis argued that sodomy corrupted the air, and that the site of Sodom and Gomorrah "is now a lake of dead water in which no fish can live and over which no flying bird can survive." Michael Solomon, "Fictions of Infection: Diseaseing the Sexual Other in Francesc Eiximenis's *Lo llibre de les dones*," in *Queer Iberia*, ed. Blackmore and Hutcheson, 277–90.

¹³¹ Horden, "Ritual and Public Health," 17.

¹³² Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, 46–48.