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Uses, Perceptions, and Symbolism

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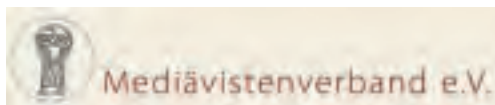
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Isabel del Val Valdivieso (Valladolid)

Beliefs, Religious Practice and Superstition in Castile in the Late Middle Ages*

Abstract: Society in the late Middle Ages viewed water as essential to its survival, as a resource that could provide revenue and power to those able to control it, and as a threat because of the forces of nature that could make water the cause of death and destruction. In other words, water was seen as both beneficial and as the origin of disaster. Such ambivalence is reflected in all walks of life, and affected both the material as well as the immaterial realms.

Water was viewed as a purifying element, both in the physical (through hygiene or cleanliness) and spiritual (baptism) sense. In this latter domain, water played a key role in the mentality of medieval society with regard to religious practices and superstition alike.

Keywords: Water, Castile, Mentality, Medieval Society, 15th century

1 Introduction

Society in the late Middle Ages viewed water as essential to its survival, and as a resource that could provide both revenue and power to those able to control it. It was also seen as a threat because of the forces of nature that could make water the cause of death and destruction. In other words, water was perceived as both beneficial and as the origin of disaster. Such ambivalence is reflected in all walks of life, and affected the material as well as the immaterial.

Water involved a strong purifying element, both in the physical sense (through hygiene or cleanliness) and the spiritual sense (through baptism). In this latter domain, water played a key role in the mentality of medieval society vis-à-vis religious practices and superstition.

Based on these premises, our research focuses on the kingdom of Castile, the largest in the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century, and concentrates on spiritual considerations as well as beliefs. Our aim is to explore and explain how, within this framework, water is seen as an element which can create life, having the ability to drive away certain dangers, whilst at the same time proving beneficial to the population's material and/or political interests.

* The present work has been carried out within the framework of Research Project HAR2012-32264, El agua en el imaginario de la Castilla bajomedieval, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO).

To conduct our study, we draw on the rules and obligations imposed by bishops on their faithful in the provincial councils, specifically certain documents reflecting the practice of rogations and the treatise against superstition written by Fray Martín de Castañega, the Canticles of Saint Mary by Alfonso X the Wise, and the catechism of Pedro de Cuéllar. We also study some late 15th century chronicles in which water is linked to divine intervention, either in favour or against certain objectives, people or groups. We will attempt to mark out the limits set at the time between superstition and faith regarding the use of water, and the need for it in its just measure, neither in excess (flooding and negative consequences) nor through a lack thereof (the need for rain to ensure the harvest during periods of drought), and in certain circumstances.

2 The search for divine intervention to ensure it rained when necessary

Although cities, crafts and trade were already highly developed, agricultural activities remained a key element for the survival and development of Lower Middle Age feudal society. In Castile, as everywhere, agriculture played a crucial role in terms of generating income and wealth, and as a vital source of the food required to meet society's needs.

Given such a context, it is easy to understand that one of the population's main concerns was to secure a good harvest, and to prevent it from being lost. The main dangers were adverse weather conditions, war and plagues. Of particular interest here are matters concerning natural adversities which, whether in the form of drought or too much rain, posed the principal threat to crops, which still provided the basis for most foods.¹ Drought is evidently a major menace to crops. Yet, an over abundance of rainfall might also prove to have disastrous consequences. One clear illustration of this is to be found in the chronicles of Andrés Bernáldez. When referring to the autumn of 1485, he states that heavy rain fell non-stop for six weeks, an unprecedented event which nobody could recall ever having witnessed previously. As a result, Seville suffered major flooding that caused many dwellings and indeed whole areas of the city to collapse, seriously endangering the entire city and its inhabitants. Other towns and villages close to the river Guadalquivir also suffered major loss of human life, buildings, livestock, crops and vineyards, together with forested areas.²

¹ Vis-à-vis the matter of food, see Bruno LAURIAUX, *Le Moyen Âge à table*, Paris 1989; Jean-Louis FLANDRIN / Massimo MONTANARI (eds.), *Historia de la alimentación*, Gijón 2004, pp. 495–686; Beatriz ARÍZAGA BOLUMBURU / Jesús Á. SOLÓRZANO TELECHEA (eds.), *Alimentar la ciudad en la Edad Media*, Logroño 2009.

² Andrés Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos don Fernando y doña Isabel*, ed. Cayetano ROSSELL in: *Historia de los Reyes de Castilla*, vol. III, Madrid 1953, chap. LXXVIII, pp. 621–622.

The emotional impact this had on people accounts for the fact that chroniclers recorded such events in their works. One example was Alonso de Palencia who, in the summer of 1460, in other words during the harvest, writes that to the north of the Duero, in the area around Valladolid and Burgos, torrential rainfall led to many people being drowned and the destruction of crops and fruit.³ Another chronicler of the time, Diego de Valera, also makes mention of this fact, referring to it as a divine signal, which in a narrative context may be interpreted as a bad omen.⁴

Whether due to a lack of rain or an excess of it, the harvest could be lost, such that people everywhere sought ways to avert these misfortunes when the danger was imminent. In order to obtain a good harvest, rain was needed at the right time and in the right amount to ensure that seeds sprouted and that plants grew. Too much or too little rain, or torrential rainfall, whether in the form of violent storms or hailstone, could ruin the crop. In addition to the financial losses this caused, it would also bring with it the threat of hunger or famine for months to come for those affected. Only if food could be procured on the market would it be possible to avert such a terrible disaster. Yet, in such instances, the high price of grain would pose a serious problem to those unable to afford it; in other words, the poorer sectors of society.

This explains the concern which the matter evoked, and also accounts for the fact that divine intervention was sought in an attempt to secure enough of the much needed rainfall to ensure that the earth bore its fruits, or to dispel the danger of the harvest being lost due to the damage caused by either too much rain or by its excessive violence.

In times of drought, processions were organised in an effort to attract rainfall by praying.⁵ We know from municipal documentary evidence that the matter was deemed so important that the whole town was obliged to attend such rogations. When this initially proved unsuccessful and the need was so intense that life itself was in danger, children's and even flagellants' processions were organised, as we know happened in certain places such as Paredes de Nava in 1477, a year in which a devastating drought swept that particular area of Castile. Documentary evidence survives of both types of procession.

One relevant question concerns who these prayers were directed at, since this also provided insights into religious matters and the devotion of those involved.

³ Alfonso de Palencia, *Gesta hispaniensi ex annalibus svorum diorum collecta*, ed. Brian TATE / Jeremy LAWRENCE, Madrid 1998, decade 1, book V, chap. X, p. 198.

⁴ Diego de Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas: Crónica de Enrique IV*, ed. Juan de Mata CARRIAZO, Madrid 1941, p. 60.

⁵ On the topic of praying for rain, see Jesús SANZ MUÑOZ, *Cultura y simbología del agua. Sacro elemento*, in: *Revista del Ministerio de obras públicas y transportes* 411 (1993), pp. 6–14; Modesto MARTÍN CEBRIÁN, *Las rogativas*, in: *Revista Folklore* 361 (2012), pp. 34–51; Antonio Luis CORTÉS PEÑA, *Entre la religiosidad popular y la institucional: las rogativas en la España moderna*, in: *Hispania. Revista española de Historia* 55/191 (1995), pp. 1027–1042.

Prayers were generally offered to God although they were also directed at particular saints or the Virgin. In the various towns and villages, prayers were directed at those saints considered to be closest, in other words those to whom the church was dedicated. Yet, such orations followed a specific order, since the patron saint of the town seems to have been the first to be called upon, almost certainly because they were deemed to have the greatest influence in the heavenly court, or were felt to be most likely to work a miracle, as is the case in Madrid, where faith in San Isidro is unquestionable.⁶ A hierarchical order is thus established, since behind the patron saint help could be sought from other saints who were the object of devotion or who had had churches dedicated to them. Prominent in this hierarchy is the Virgin. Saint Mary, as she was known in the Canticles of Alfonso X the Wise, was considered an excellent intermediary between man and God, such that her followers recommended prayers be directed to her in order to obtain the much sought after rain. This occurred in the city of Jerez where, after several unsuccessful processions, prayers were finally directed at the Virgin, who brought about the much needed rains which saved the crop. The Canticle related that Jerez stood on the banks of the river Guadalquivir and that it was beset by a terrible drought. Faced with such a situation, a priest convinced the faithful to repent their sins and pray to the Virgin, imploring her to intervene. This evidently worked, since it did indeed rain abundantly.⁷

The material and earthly aspects of these processions imploring the rains are a further indication of the importance which lower medieval society attached to them. Local councils were in charge of organising them, paying those who organised them, and on occasions giving food to the participants in the form of bread, wine and cheese, as we know was the case in Paredes de Nava and other villages in the area in 1477.⁸

3 Averting the threat of a storm

If rainfall can prove beneficial when falling at the right time and in the right amount, it can also become a serious danger when this is not the case. Different sources of the time highlight this twin perception of water in an agricultural context as something

⁶ Eduardo JIMÉNEZ RAYADO, *El agua imaginada: rogativas y peticiones de lluvia en el Madrid medieval*, in: M^a Isabel DEL VAL VALDIVIESO (ed.), *La percepción del agua en la Edad Media*, Alicante 2015, pp. 295–307.

⁷ *En tòn a Virgen as nuves abrir / fez e delas gran chuvia sair / que quantos choraban fezo riir / e it con grand' alegría*. Alfonso X el Sabio, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, ed. Walter METTMANN, vol. 1, Vigo 1981, Cantiga 143 (*Como Santa María fez en Xerez chover por rogo dos pecadores que lle foron pedir por merçee que les diesse chova*), pp. 504–505.

⁸ Juan Carlos MARTÍN CEA, *El mundo rural castellano a fines de la Edad Media. El ejemplo de Paredes de Nava en el siglo XV*, Valladolid 1991, p. 393.

which is both essential and potentially dangerous, and the means adopted to bring about the former and prevent the latter.

What most seemed to terrify people of the time was a storm. In order to avert these, a system was used which is recorded in the decisions adopted by the synods of the Castilian dioceses, and in municipal documents, and which consisted of ringing the church bells. The fact that this was regulated by the synods may be explained because of the use of the bells, an instrument linked to churches and controlled by the ecclesiastical authorities. Usually, the municipal authorities were involved because it was they who paid the priests responsible in each church for ringing the bells whenever necessary.

As regards the municipal authorities, returning to the example of Paredes de Nava, we see that here it is the sacristans who ring the bells when a storm threatens, and who are paid for their services by the local council. When the danger was greatest, between May and late September, they had to ring the bells three times a day: at dawn, mid-day and in the evening, although if faced with a serious threat of a storm, they might be forced to spend the whole day ringing the bells non-stop, for which purpose turns were established amongst the four churches in the area. As for payment, the sacristan of the main church was paid more than those in the other three churches.⁹ In the following centuries, similar events are recorded in other places such as certain towns in Cantabria. In 1508, the municipal authorities at Motrico hired the services of a priest to summon up clouds, as did the town of Laredo in 1547. Castro Urdiales was another town to engage such services, although here only in summer and with aim of warding off the danger of hail.¹⁰

As regards the matter of ecclesiastical control, in the synodal decisions taken in the dioceses of Palencia by Bishop Diego de Deza in 1500, express reference is made to ringing the bells in an effort to keep storms at bay. It was forbidden for too much money to be used to pay for such services, even with banquets, at the expense of money collected through tithes.¹¹ Yet, the matter was not only left in the hands of the church authorities, since treatise writers were also involved.

Fray Martín de Castañega, who took charge of ringing the bells, gave instructions concerning what was to be done to ward off the threat of a storm. Once the storm was deemed to be approaching, the bell would warn all the faithful that they should gather in the church and, surrounded by many candles, pray on their knees to the Holy Father; they would sing *Salve Regina* (Hail Holy Queen), a prayer directed at the Virgin, who was seen as intervening. The priest would then appear wearing a surplice and stole, and would read from the Bible. The faithful would then leave the church

⁹ MARTÍN CEA (note 8), pp. 393–394.

¹⁰ Rosa María DE TORO MIRANDA, *La villa de Laredo en la Edad Media (1200–1516)*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Cantabria University 2014, p. 371.

¹¹ *Synodicon hispanum VII*, Burgos y Palencia, ed. Antonio GARCÍA Y GARCÍA / Bernardo ALONSO RODRÍGUEZ, Madrid 1997, pp. 529–530 (henceforth cited as *Synodicon hispanum VII*).

in procession holding the cross and proceed towards the threatening cloud, singing various songs and saying different prayers. Having completed this, all that remained was to trust in God and to rest assured that if there was still a hailstorm it was because God wished to punish them or put them to the test.¹²

Yet, fear of the ills that could be brought on by a storm was so great that people also resorted to cloud conjurers in an effort to avert hailstorms. In his 1529 treatise against superstition, Castañega writes that such conjurers are to be found almost everywhere, that they are sometimes priests who climb up to the towers in order to be closer to the clouds and who are paid for their work. When the danger was imminent, they practised certain rites and uttered spells to prevent the storm from unleashing its wrath or to turn the hailstones into water and convert the threat into beneficial rain. Such practices were condemned by the author, who seeks to explain in rational terms why this is magic, and not a Christian act. Yet, Castañega's explanation of what causes the hailstorm does not divert him from his belief in divine intervention. He recommends praying so that God will prevent the water from the clouds freezing. In other words, he is asking for rain rather than hailstone to fall.¹³ What we are faced with is an extremely fine line between magic and Christian rites. Indeed, the two differ not because of the intervention or otherwise of a priest, since some of those uttering spells may well have been priests, but rather in the words used.

4 Interpreting meteorological phenomena as an expression of divine will

Faith led to inexplicable phenomena or adverse circumstances which were hard to endure being seen as the intervention of the divine or the devil. This was true of all sectors of society, and helped people digest misfortunes and frustrations. At times, such meteorological phenomena were seen as a sign of what was to come, as was the case with the events of October 1470. This was when the swearing in of Joanna de Trastámara, the much disputed daughter of Enrique IV, as crown princess followed by her betrothal to the brother of the King of France, took place. When narrating these events, the King's official chronicler, Enríquez del Castillo, relates that on the return journey to Segovia, on the day after the ceremony, and when about to cross the mountain pass, the royal retinue was surprised by heavy rain, wind and snow which caused the death of several people and delayed the royal family's return to Segovia by a few days. The threat of civil war hung in the air at this time in Castile, given that part of the kingdom's nobility, headed by Isabel, the king's sister, opposed Joanna being rec-

¹² Fray Martín de Castañega, *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechicerías y de la posibilidad y remedio dellas* (1529), ed. Juan Robert MUÑO ABAD, Logroño 1994, pp. 62–66.

¹³ Fray Martín de Castañega (note 12), pp. 57–59.

ognised as the monarch's legitimate daughter. In relation to this event, the chronicler states that the storm blocking the route of the royal retinue was seen as an ill omen for the interests of the king and his daughter.¹⁴

This was how Enríquez del Castillo narrated the events, reporting that the divine sign occurred after the solemn act of the swearing in and betrothal of princess Joanna. However, another chronicler of the time, who also reports these events, places the downpour before the start of the ceremony. Diego de Valera reports that, with the ceremony already underway, and even though it was a clear day, the skies suddenly darkened and it began to rain and hail. All those present sought refuge where best they could, without sparing a thought for the King's daughter, who had to be aided by a footman. The narrator says that the storm was seen by all as an ill omen, and Joanna's being left alone under the torrential rain as a portent of the misfortunes that would befall the kingdom because of her.¹⁵

Whatever the case, divine intervention is felt to be present, as is portrayed by the chroniclers when narrating certain events, particularly when confrontations were in evidence. One major aspect of feudal society was to wage war. In the period in question this involved the struggle against Muslim power, reflected in the Iberian Peninsula in the Christian monarchs' gradual conquest of Moorish held territory. Said enterprise leads us to the war for Granada, with the armies of the Catholic Monarchs engaging in a prolonged campaign that culminated with their entering Granada in January 1492.¹⁶ Chroniclers narrating the shifting fortunes of said campaign refer on occasions to the presence or absence of rainfall as a miracle, a divine intervention from God favouring the Christian troops.

Water is clearly essential to human survival. Therefore, when under attack those besieged searched desperately for water, whilst the attackers sought to deprive them of it. When the enemy troops had managed to cut off the water supply to those defending, the latter could only hope and pray for the rain that would allow them to fill their wells and water tanks. Without rain, the besieged town was doomed. This was exactly what occurred during the siege of Malaga in 1487. In his chronicle, Diego de Valera felt that this circumstance was due to God wishing to favour Isabel and Ferdinand.

Another chronicler of the time, Alonso de Palencia, also attributes certain events, not to the expertise of the Castilian army or to the incompetence of the Nasrids, but to the will of God being done irrespective of man's actions. During the siege of Baza in 1489, an important stronghold on the Catholic monarchs' advance towards Granada, the Castilian troops were on the verge of exhaustion, which brightened the spirits of the besieged army who trusted that the autumn rains would render the situation of

¹⁴ Diego Enríquez del Castillo, *Crónica de Enrique IV*, ed. Aureliano SÁNCHEZ MARTÍN, Valladolid 1994, p. 361.

¹⁵ Diego de Valera (note 4), p. 177.

¹⁶ Miguel Ángel LADERO QUESADA, *Castilla y la conquista del reino de Granada*, Granada 1993; Miguel Ángel LADERO QUESADA, *Las guerras de Granada en el siglo XV*, Barcelona 2002.

the Castilians impossible, since the latter were enduring terrible shortages and disasters. It did indeed rain continuously and copiously for two weeks in late September and early October 1487, much to the joy of those besieged who were convinced that the Castilian troops would be forced to withdraw given that their situation was unsustainable due to the adverse weather conditions. Yet, God sought to tip the balance in favour of the Christians, such that the rains were followed by fifty days of good weather, which allowed the besieging army to sow the surrounding fields, thus raising their spirits and giving them hope. The favourable weather also allowed several months' provisions to arrive thanks to the improved road conditions. When Baza finally fell, the chronicler had no hesitation in attributing the success of the undertaking to God, stressing that it was thanks to divine will, and not to the efforts of the King and Queen or the kingdom, that a Castilian victory had been achieved.¹⁷

5 Water as a repairing and purifying element

As regards meeting both material and spiritual needs, whilst remaining within the sphere of religious belief, we see other practices in which water plays a leading role in the form of ceremonies where it was used because of the healing power it was believed to hold. It should be remembered that the medieval mind endowed water with tremendous symbolic value, and that it was held to be sacred, as can even be seen in legal works such as the Castilian King Alfonso X's *Partidas* or *Seven-Part Code*.¹⁸

The Christian notion of the world still revolved around the four basic elements, one of these being water, which played a key role. It is therefore hardly surprising that it should appear as a metaphor in many wide-ranging circumstances.¹⁹ This explains why, for consecration, the chalice should contain wine and a little water. When seeking to justify this mixture, it is felt that water represents man since, just as water flows, so does human life, from birth to death. Water also refers to the blood mixed with wine which flowed from Jesus Christ's side on the cross, although it would seem that for Bishop Pedro de Cuéllar water basically represents man, which is why

¹⁷ Alonso de Palencia, *Crónica de Enrique IV*, vol. III (War of Granada), ed. Antonio PAZ Y MELIÁ, Madrid 1975, pp. 232–234.

¹⁸ Juan Antonio BONACHÍA HERNANDO, *El agua en las Partidas*, in: M^a Isabel DEL VAL VALDIVIESO / Juan Antonio BONACHÍA HERNANDO (eds.), *Agua y sociedad en la Edad Media hispana*, Granada 2012, pp. 23–25.

¹⁹ The metaphor appears time and again when highlighting the need to calm spirits or seek peace. This is reflected in the letter which Diego de Valera purports to have sent to John II, entreating him to avoid conflict and war in the struggle for power in Castile, beseeching him to *derrame el agua de vuestra benigna clemencia sobre tan vivas llamas de fuego* (pour the water of your benign mercy on the burning flames of the fire), in order to avoid the *tantos males cuantos se esperan* (many troubles which are to befall). Diego de Valera, *Crónica abreviada*, ed. Juan de Mata CARRIAZO, in: *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, Madrid 1941, p. 311.

only a small amount should be present in the chalice compared to the amount of wine, given man's insignificance when compared to God. Water is endowed with tremendous value since the two elements, wine and water, are essential for consecration.²⁰ We see, for instance, how water is present in the central mystery of medieval Christianity, transubstantiation. But it is well known that this is not the only aspect of the liturgy in which it appears. It is also central to the sacrament of baptism, together with certain other practices and rites.

One widespread practice was to use the water in which holy objects, such as the chalice or relics, had been washed in order to heal people or animals. Here, the faithful, showing their conviction, trust and devotion, would ask priests for the water so that they could pour it over the sick person or animal, in the hope they would be cured by its healing power.²¹ It should be pointed out that the water used to wash objects that have been in contact with holy vessels was of concern to the church and to priests, as may be seen in other sources, such as Pedro de Cuéllar's early 15th century catechism, which states that said water should be kept close to the altar.²²

Castañega feels this to be common practice, and even admits, or at least does not condemn, certain rites linked to white magic, in other words witchcraft which seeks to do good. Such practices include writing a given word at the bottom of a cup, pouring water over it so that it is erased, and then drinking the water, a system used to improve marital relations, either to calm passions or to dispel evil.²³

First and foremost, water held healing power for Christians, reflected particularly in baptism and other circumstances. It was, for example, used to remove venial sins given that, as Bishop Pedro de Cuéllar points out, those who receive holy water are cleansed of such stains.²⁴ When priests are summoned in communion to the house of someone who is ill, they are preceded by altar boys who, in addition to carrying lit candles and a small bell to announce their arrival, also carry holy water.²⁵ Yet, where water played its most central role was in the baptism ceremony, in which original sin was washed away.

As pointed out by Pedro de Cuéllar, two elements are essential when administering this particular sacrament: water and the word. Focusing on the former, we see how it must be poured over the head, deemed to be the most important part of the human body, since it was where reason was held to exist. Moreover, only water could be used. No other liquid was possible; nor could the water be mixed with anything

²⁰ José Luis MARTÍN / Antonio LINAGE CONDE, *Religión y sociedad medieval. El catecismo de Pedro de Cuéllar (1325)*, Salamanca 1987, p. 205. Also in: *Synodicon hispanum VI*, Ávila y Segovia, ed. Antonio GARCÍA Y GARCÍA, Madrid 1993, pp. 303–304 (henceforth cited as *Synodicon hispanum VI*).

²¹ Fray Martín de Castañega (note 12), p. 40.

²² MARTÍN / LINAGE CONDE, (note 20), p. 208. Also in: *Synodicon hispanum VI* (note 20), p. 307.

²³ Fray Martín de Castañega (note 12), p. 38.

²⁴ MARTÍN / LINAGE CONDE, (note 20), p. 194.

²⁵ *Synodicon hispanum VII* (note 11), pp. 61, 184.

else. This appears to have been because of the symbolic value of water, or at least this is how it is explained by Cuéllar when he says that the sacraments are sources from which good comes forth: as water cleanses the body, so the sacraments cleanse the soul; as water cools and refreshes the body, so the sacraments refresh the soul against the heat and passion aroused by sin. Just as water feeds the ground so that it may bear fruit, so the sacraments help Christians to be virtuous and to do good deeds.²⁶ Probably in order to ensure that the baptismal water preserved all its properties, and was not contaminated or used incorrectly, in 1529 a synod of the bishopric of Segovia ordered that all baptism fonts be kept under lock and key and that the key remain in the safe keeping of the priest.²⁷

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that water plays a central role in the collective imagination of medieval society, since it was seen as essential to both material and spiritual life. Moreover, water, in its various manifestations, but above all in the form of rain (and its consequences), was perceived as an instrument employed by God to favour certain people or groups over others or to test the devotion of the faithful, or as a punishment for doing ill deeds.

Linked to this particular view of how water is understood, we find practices which fall half way between faith and superstition. These take the form of actions which, as we have seen in the case of rogations or attempts to avert storms, are difficult to balance between orthodoxy and magic. In the case of the threat of rain, one striking point is that we fail to find any examples of what happens when there is too much rain; in other words, when there is damage caused by excess water which inundates roads, and floods crops, which are then lost.

On a different note, those affected by the lack of rain or who fear an approaching storm, call on the divine to bring rain or to drive away the clouds. In the case of ceremonies considered to be orthodox, we see that an appeal is made to God, to certain saints, and above all to the Virgin, seen as the principal mediator who, taking pity on the suffering of the faithful, will intercede so that God will heed their prayers.

The attitude and expressions of lower medieval Castilians with regard to water highlight their faith in the divine and their belief that they will be rewarded if they follow the right path. They thus interpret certain natural phenomena which favour their interests as a manifestation of divine will and as a reward for having acted correctly. As we have seen, this serves to justify a political-military action, the struggle against the kingdom of Granada, which becomes a good and just cause, since they

are favoured by God who provides them with rain or causes a drought, whichever happens to support Castilian interests. On other occasions, if the meteorological phenomena prove detrimental to the faithful, this may be interpreted as either a punishment for some wrong-doing or as an opportunity which God is giving them to earn merit for the other life.

In sum, a link emerges between certain manifestations of water and the Christian faith, its use as a key element in certain rites and how it is perceived as an instrument in the hands of the maker to punish some and to reward others.

²⁶ MARTÍN / LINAGE CONDE (note 20), pp. 186–188.

²⁷ Synodicon hispanum VI (note 20), p. 522.