

THIS MONTH – CLIMATE AND DEVOTION: PRAYING FOR GOOD WEATHER

The chapel of Nossa Senhora da Orada (Melgaço, Viana do castelo, NW Portugal)



Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Orada, Melgaço. More images available at http://www.monumentos.gov.pt/Site/APP_PagesUser/SIPA.aspx?id=3498

The Chapel of Our Holy Lady of Orada (Nossa Senhora da Orada) is located in the parish of Vila, Melgaço village ([42°7'12.0"N, 8°15'7.9"W](#)), Viana do Castelo, in the northwest of Portugal. It is one of the temples with most religious devotion in that region, as well in Portugal. It rises in a terrace, providing an excellent view over the village of Melgaço. Its construction was sponsored by the monks of the neighboring monastery of Fiães, of the Order of Cluny, which is dated to the middle of 13th century and characterized by its Romanic architecture style.

The chapel's name - Our Lady of Orada - testifies for the devotion of the believers, prayers and pilgrims, searching for the benefits of Holy Lady's protection. This place is, indeed, the theater where the relations between Human and Nature perform. In times of big calamities, such as lengthened winters, widened dry/hot summers, earthquakes or epidemics, the population of Melgaço, and surrounds, organized penitential processions to the chapel, imploring protection and divine intervention. It was the case of the procession that occurred on 8th September 1768 and 9th June 1782. The first one was due to «the heavy rains and storms». The second

procession had a specific goal: to «pray to God and ask him to help us with favorable weather conditions for the salvation of the crops». Both processions departed from the church of Misericórdia of Melgaço (the Mercy Church), led by the image of Senhor dos Passos (associated with the Passion of Christ), and progressed towards the chapel of Nossa Senhora da Orada, where a sermon was preached.

This kind of behavior has been identified in other related studies, in different locations. Rogation ceremonies were motivated by natural calamities, namely extreme weather events, and were a common practice in other Portuguese regions (Silva, 2019), as well as in other Catholic countries (Martín-Vide et al., 1995). When dealing with severe adverse meteorological situations that disrupted crops, the population asked for the divine mercy and forgiveness for their human offense against God, through public prayers or processions, either to obtain rain (*Pro Pluvia*) or to stop an extreme rain period (*Pro Serenitate*).

Due to their intrinsic characteristics and a careful and regular registration, *Pro Pluvia* and *Pro Serenitate* rogations were proven to be an excellent historical indicator (*proxy-data*) to reconstruct pre-instrumental climate. The long term continuity of these rogations, their spatial dispersion, the possibility of dating them accurately, the participation of institutions in their organization, the set of standardized procedures, as well as the capability to reflect in some cases the intensity of the meteorological phenomenon, are reasons to consider this information as an important contribution to the Historical Climatology reconstruction.

The processions mentioned above are part of a set of indicators that make possible to reconstruct and propose an early modern periodization of the NW of Portugal's climate frame, characterized by a strong rainfall variability and by a reduced number of thermal paroxysms (Silva, 2019).

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