

Lessons from history as gargoyles protect Segovia Cathedral



For five hundred years the dragons, eagles, lions and dogs that leer down from high on Segovia Cathedral have held on to a secret. It took an apocalyptic storm for the gothic [gargoyles](#) to reveal all to 21st-century Spaniards.

When an electrical storm caused a huge downpour this week, across Spain roads turned into rivers, hailstones battered towns and a tornado smashed an electricity pylon and trees. However, one building remained unaffected: the cathedral in Segovia, a city 55 miles north of Madrid. Residents soon noticed that the water was being channelled away from the building by the gargoyles.

Footage of the rainwater cascading away from the building into the middle of the street was shared widely online.



The design proved its worth this week

The cathedral, built between 1525 and 1577, has 35 gargoyles. Experts said that modern architects could learn much from their medieval ancestors, as climate change leads to increasingly unpredictable weather. The design of Segovia Cathedral means that the rainwater flows into channels on the roof and then towards the gargoyles around the building. It is then thrown away from the roof towards the gutters in the road far below.

Professor Janetta Rebold Benton, of Pace University in New York, the author of *Holy Terrors: Gargoyles on Medieval Buildings*, said: "The primary function of the gargoyles is as gutters to throw the rainwater wide of the wall and avoid eroding the mortar between the stones. The gargoyles are simultaneously functional, decorative and at times didactic — while at other times pure earthy humour."

There were more than 9,000 lightning strikes in Madrid alone on Monday night. Rubén del Campo, of Aemet, the Spanish meteorological office, warned that more of the same could be expected: "We are living in a situation where there is no doubt that these higher temperatures mean there's more water vapour in the atmosphere — and that's the fuel that feeds the storms."

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