

Famines in the Abruzzi Region (1590-1650)

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Bad harvests were quite common in preindustrial Europe. Scholars have estimated that food shortages occurred every four years or so. Widespread famines were characterized by an increase in the mortality rate directly linked to lack of food (Alfani 2010b, 2; Ó Gráda 2009, 4). Catastrophic famines, however, were much less common than simple food shortages. In addition to an increase in the death rate and a decrease in the marriage and birth rates, famines caused massive migrations and social upheavals.

In the first part of this article, I will attempt to shed light on some of the famines in the Abruzzi region in the period 1590-1650. I have consulted mainly ecclesiastical archives containing trial transcripts dealing with prostitution, concubinage, rape, adultery, kidnapping and banditry. These proved to be a valuable source because witnesses, questioned by the judges, made repeated references to the years of famine. Also chronicles, municipal histories and Episcopal visits make the same references.

In the second part I will focus on the effects of the 1648-49 famine in the town of Teramo and in the nearby territory providing demographic indicators. I will use for this purpose notary deeds and the bishop's correspondence. I will also examine parochial registers from 1640 onwards. An analysis of these documents will show how social life was disrupted by the lack of resources and food. Violence increased and a growing number of bandits contended with official authorities the control of the territory.

1. 1590-1650. Historians agree that starting in the 1580s a decrease in average temperatures led to crop failures and famines throughout Europe (Appleby 1980; Loehle, McCulloch 2008). This period has been defined as the «apogee of the Little Ice Age, a regimen of climatic extremes that would last over two centuries» (Fagan 2000, 103). Abruzzi is no exception. I want to stress, however, that any form of environmental determinism should be avoided, since famines were complex phenomena and were triggered by a multiplicity of factors (Alfani 2011, 23).

People were painfully aware of the fact that harvests were highly variable at the end of the 1580s. During the 1588 Episcopal visit, a priest, questioned by the bishop about the yield of a piece of land, said that it was difficult to answer because in a given year it could produce a certain number of bushels (*some*) and in another year half that amount (ASDT-13).

In the years 1590-93 agricultural production plummeted. Those years left an

indelible mark on individual and collective memory. I found one of the most vivid pieces of evidence confirming this fact in a municipal history of the town of Teramo written by the late-Sixteenth century patrician and humanist Mutio Muzii.

When dealing with prominent contemporary personalities, he cited public officials such as Giovan Cola Conti, Pietro Urbani, Incecco di Furia and Luca di Furia. Muzi's opinion was that «thanks to the diligence of these officials, a third of the town population was saved from starvation». In fact, during the 1591 famine they were able to provide Teramo with «wheat and barley» in spite of «rigid winter temperatures, [...] and the dangers posed by highway robbers which hindered transportation» (Muzii 1893, 228)¹. In those lines he was describing the most severe and the longest famine in early modern Italy (Del Panta 1982, 182). We do not know if those measures were effective or if Muzii was simply celebrating the members of the oligarchy who governed the city. The latter hypothesis is more likely².

However, the local agricultural markets were not sufficient to feed the entire population of Teramo. Therefore the above mentioned officials, accompanied by some other patricians, were sent to Apulia, 300 kilometers to the south, to purchase grains.

In 1593 the situation was still highly critical. In the San Giovanni valley, six kilometers from Teramo, agricultural production was still below pre-famine levels. When the Bishop questioned a priest coming from that part of the diocese, he was told:

In previous years we used to produce between fifteen and eighteen somas of wheat, but now that we are in the middle of a food shortage, because we have consumed the seeds, we have only been able to produce seven somas (ADST-2).

In severe famines, in order to avoid the prospect of starving to death, people often ate seeds thus compromising the possibility of a good harvest the following year (Alfani 2010a, 126). Apparently, that's what happened during long 1590-93 crisis.

Visiting the church of Santa Maria ad Nubes, in the small village of Ripattoni, the bishop was told that a tract of land adjoining the church «in good years it is rented out for thirty ducats, but this year, because it has been left fallow for lack of tenants, it will only produce one soma» (ADST-12). As in other parts of the Italian peninsula in the same period, many fields were left unattended due to migrations and seed shortage. Its unusual duration made this famine particularly painful.

Another type of source I have used are trial transcripts. People, questioned by ecclesiastical authorities, made repeated references to hunger and starvation and referred to 1591 as the year of the great famine.

A priest, named Don Intino, was reported to the ecclesiastical authorities because he was absent from his parish. A woman said : «It was the year of the famine, in which people starved to death [...] When a beggar died, I was called to bury her and Don Intino was absent» (ADST-6). Burying dead people without a religious ceremony could have dire consequences. In those days, people believed that without the benefit of sacraments, the dead could become dangerous revenants, who would come back to haunt the living.

The risk of starvation varied according to one's socioeconomic status. The life

of widows, in particular, was in jeopardy due to their low income. Some of them became vagrant, others offered sexual favors in exchange for food.

In a 1599 trial transcript, people tried to bring discredit upon the widow Picciotta di Simone saying that «due to her poverty [...] during the famine she gave her body to whoever wanted it» (ADST-4). Similar references to famine are frequent in trial transcripts from those years. Women's sexual misconduct was often hunger related.

Trials for usury vividly describe the strategy adopted by people to survive the 1590-93 famine. The poorest of the poor were forced to borrow money or cereals from rich people. They found themselves in dire straits because they had to give back to the rich lenders a much higher quantity of food than they had borrowed. In those days, grains were not traded according to their weight but according to their value, therefore in famine years a specific amount of money could buy only a small amount of food but when the poor paid back the lenders, after the famine, a much larger amount of food had to be given back for the simple reason that by then prices were significantly lower. For this reason so many of them were forced to sell off their possessions (Cattini 2010, 136).

Others tried to avoid giving back what they had borrowed by accusing the creditors of usury and by reporting them to the ecclesiastical authorities. It is highly significant that five such trials were celebrated in the years 1592-94 while I have found no evidence of similar trials in periods of good harvests.

For the early modern Church an usurer was anyone who «gave wheat, barley and other things on credit above the market price and who charged interest on money lent» (ADST-1).

In July 1593 a man, named Giovan Felice di Iulio, was reported to the ecclesiastical authorities because he had lent barley to many citizens when its price had skyrocketed reaching 20 caroli. However, after the 1593 harvest, the price had decreased to 5 caroli and for that reason the borrowers owed him a quadruple amount of barley. One of the witnesses, questioned during this trial, said that he was forced to accept such deleterious terms because «he had no alternative since his family was starving» (ADST-1).

This was the worst famine ever occurred in early modern Italy and triggered a long period of crisis. The climate changes impacted negatively on agricultural production in the whole of southern Italy. Starting at the beginning of the Seventeenth century, Apulia, the bread basket of the Kingdom of Naples, experienced a significant reduction in its production of wheat and in its ability to export. Also olives and vines, two traditional crops, saw their yield diminish significantly (Malanima 1998, 92-93). The cooling of the temperatures affected negatively the pastoral economy as well. For instance, in 1611-12, because of the rigid temperatures, 1,3 million sheep died in the winter pastures of Apulia. It was almost 70% of the total number registered by the Dogana in Foggia, the Customs office responsible for overseeing the flow and the taxation of the herds. Many of them had been moved from the mountainous areas of the Abruzzi region. As expected, this catastrophe had dramatic repercussions on wool production (Marino 1992, 277-283).

The coastal areas of Abruzzi, highly dependent on the network of Venetian

ships, were also affected by the general decline of Venice as a maritime power (Bulgarelli Lukacs 2006, 67).

The region experienced a significant demographic decline. The number of households fell by 7,5% between 1595 and 1648. In Teramo they plummeted from 845 households in 1611 to 417 in 1628 (Bulgarelli Lukacs 2006, 90-92).

The petitions for pardon and release, that I have analyzed, offer further proof of the social and economic crisis that affected Abruzzi. We often find the recurring theme of starvation used as grounds for release from prison. For instance, in 1615, a priest who had been put in prison for various offences, begged for pardon, because, according to him, due to his poverty, he was at risk of «starving to death which is the worst martyrdom that a human being can experience» (ADST-3).

As evidenced by the above mentioned 1593 trial, usury continued to be perceived as a serious crime, to the point that in March 1607, the bishop of Teramo formally promulgated a decree against it. The decree started by saying «I have discovered with dismay that in these times of calamity, in our diocese, the poor are not afflicted only by the famine, but are victims of usury on the part of miscreants» (ADST-10). Anyone who had charged interest on «money, grains, olive oil, legumes» had to be reported to the ecclesiastical authorities to be excommunicated. It was an attempt to stave off the worst effects of the famine and to reduce social inequalities. In the village of Monsampolo 51 individuals actually reported fellow citizens for the crime of usury (ADST-10).

This and other similar trials demonstrate that the impact of a famine was determined by the social class in which one belonged. For wealthier individuals, who had stored grains, it was actually an opportunity to make a hefty profit, by taking advantage of ever-changing prices. For the lowest classes it meant financial disaster which often implied losing money and property (Romani 1983, 1308).

Even though we do not have any studies focusing on the economic crisis in Abruzzi in the 1620s, many historians have shown that dearth was frequent in central Italy. In Tuscany, the 1621 harvest was disastrous. The social and economic difficulties were exacerbated by the outbreak of a typhus epidemic (Cipolla 1979, 15-22) which rapidly spread to the nearby Papal States (Verducci 1995, 170).

One of the most vivid pieces of evidence underlining the crisis affecting Abruzzi at the beginning of the 1620s is offered by the case of a widow, driven to prostitution as a way of surviving. She reported during her trial in 1624:

I offered myself to him because of the bitter year. The first time we had a sexual encounter, he came to my house at midnight, brought a jug of wine and a piece of bread, food which was used to alleviate my daughter's hunger and make her stop crying (ADST-7).

Chastity was exchanged for bread and wine; famine led to the breakdown of normal behavior and values.

Throughout the 1630s municipal authorities were deeply concerned about poor harvests and the consequent food shortages. In the town of L'Aquila, in December 1631, the Parliament gathered to raise money to buy food. In their official report they wrote:

It is obvious to anyone that good government requires that, in times like these, a large supply of grains be gathered and be put at the service of the poor and of the rest of the citizenry. We went to great lengths to find the money that will enable us to offer this vital service during this famine year (ASC-1).

Good government implied that every town had to be provided with grains and bread. When that did not happen, riots always broke out. In a 1636 report from the city of Lanciano to the Regia Audienza (Royal Court), meteorological anomalies were indicated as the cause of the insufficient agricultural production. Officials wrote that:

There were two hailstorms, the first one on the seventeenth of June, the second one on the tenth of July. They were followed by eight consecutive days of heavy rain that badly damaged wheat, barley, legumes, vines and the few olive trees that were left (ASC-2).

This situation further depressed the already poor municipal finances as stated by its the officials:

The tax on flour, traditionally a major source of income for the town, started producing less and less income because many of the city dwellers had moved out either to avoid paying the high city taxes or simply because they could no longer earn a living in town (ASC-2).

Those words come as no surprise, since the budget deficit of many towns of the Abruzzi region increased significantly during the first decades of the Seventeenth century (Bulgarelli Lukacs 2006, 67).

2. The 1648-49 Famine. The historian Alessandra Bulgarelli Lukacs (2006, 77) wrote that, in the first four decades of the Seventeenth century, some areas of the Abruzzi region successfully overcame the crisis by diversifying economic activities. However, she also added that starting in the 1640s the crisis became more generalized. At the end of that period one of the worst food shortages ever hit the area we are focusing on.

1648-49 were years of famine throughout Europe due to bad weather conditions (Livi Bacci 1991, 52-54). In central Italy, the weather had been rainy and wet since the end of 1647 and the winter of 1648 had been particularly cold (Guenzi 1978, 169). These were the worst possible conditions for the cultivation of grains. In fact, although grains could resist extremely cold temperatures, extreme moisture or droughts could be lethal for them causing a drastic reduction in the food supply (Alfani 2010a, 8).

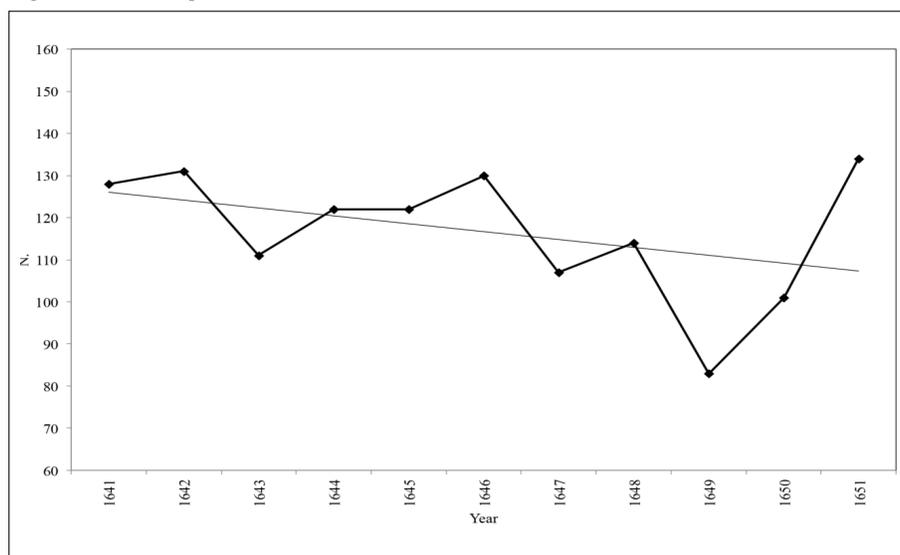
Due to these climatic conditions, the 1647 harvest was extremely poor in central and southern Italy and so was that of 1648 (Papagna 1990, 47-48; Hanlon 2007, 141-142). Only in 1649 grain production recovered³. That meant that from 1647 to 1649, after the food supply had run out, the specter of hunger, always feared by preindustrial societies, became real.

The 1647-48 revolts in the Kingdom of Naples were a key factor in triggering the famine because they made farm work difficult (Galasso 2006, 539). The rebellion started out in the capital in July 1647 and quickly spread to the provinces. It

Tab. 1. *Children baptized (1641-51)*

Years	Children baptized in Teramo Cathedral	Children baptized in San Pietro ad Lacum
1641	128	4
1642	131	2
1643	111	7
1644	122	3
1645	122	5
1646	130	4
1647	107	7
1648	114	2
1649	83	1
1650	101	8
1651	134	7

Source: ASDT-14, ASDT-15.

Fig. 1. *Children baptized in the Teramo Cathedral (1641-51)*

Source: ASDT-14.

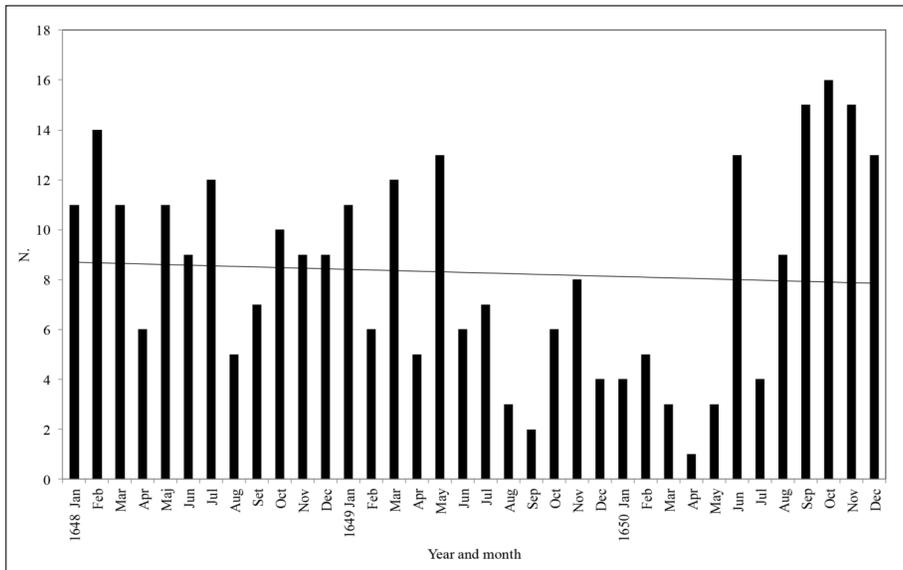
was led by Masaniello, a fishmonger who together with other retailers protested against a tax imposed on the fruit trade by the Spanish authorities.

As a result, in February 1649, the price of wheat in Naples almost quadrupled. The food shortage forced authorities to postpone trials against the rebels. In fact, many people were expected to flock to the city for those trials and supplying the additional population with a sufficient amount of food required time (Galasso 2006, 539).

Tab. 2. *Number of baptisms per month (1648-50)*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1648	11	14	11(1)	6	11(2)	9(2)	12(1)	5	7	10	9	9
1649	11	6	12	5	13(1)	6	7(1)	3	2	6	8	4
1650	4	5	3	1	3(2)	13	4	9	15	16	15	13

Source: ASDT-14.

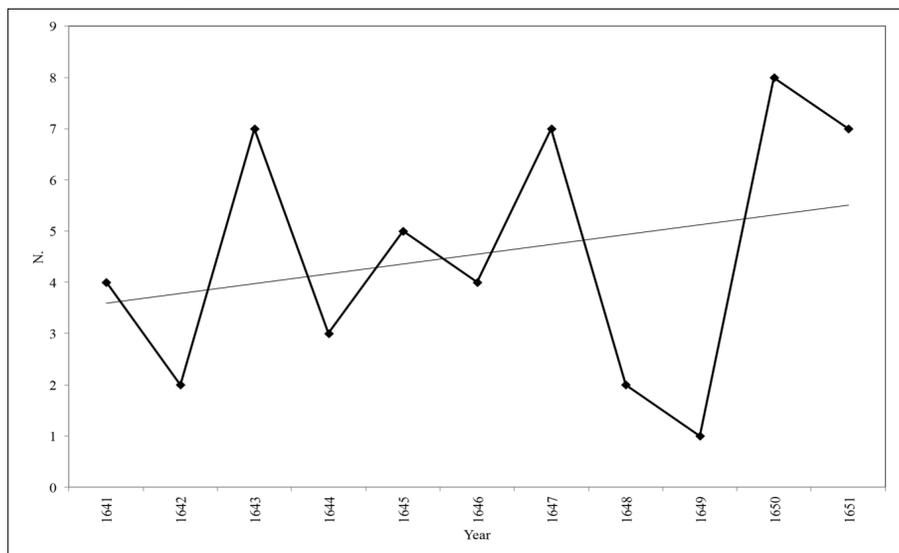
Fig. 2. *Number of baptisms per month (1648-50)*

Source: ASDT-14.

2.1. *Demographic evidence.* Demographic indicators tell us how hard the 1648-49 famine hit. We cannot calculate mortality rate in Teramo because burial registers, for those years, have been lost. However, we have comprehensive data for birth rates which are usually considered a more reliable indicator for famine years. In fact, deaths occur only in the final phase of a famine when the lack of food becomes catastrophic while births diminish from the beginning (Alfani 2011, 23).

The average number of baptisms celebrated in the Cathedral of Teramo in the period from 1641 to 1648 was 120,6 per year (tab. 1, fig. 1). During 1649 their number dropped to 83. This means that they had plummeted by more than 30%. They reached 101 in 1650, still well below the pre-famine average. 1651 witnessed an explosion of baptisms reaching 134⁴.

If we consider the number of births for each month, the decrease at the peak of the crisis becomes even more striking (tab. 2, fig. 2). The worst period was between

Fig. 3. *Children baptized in San Pietro ad Lacum (1641-51)*

Source: ASDT-15.

June 1649 and May 1650, when only 55 children were baptized in twelve months. The decline was 54,2%, compared to the average for other years. This figure reflects a huge drop in the number of conceptions following the disastrous June 1648 harvest.

Data from a nearby rural parish provide further evidence of the severity of the famine (fig. 3). In the church of San Pietro Ad Lacum, five kilometers from the city center, the number of births fell from an average of 4,2 during the first part of the 1640s to only 1 in 1649. The year 1650 witnessed the highest number (8) of births for the entire decade. In 1651 their number remained almost constant (7).

This decline can be explained by the fact that, in periods of food shortage, people postponed marriage and married couples intentionally avoided pregnancies (Alfani 2011, 37-38; Hanlon 2007, 141-43). At the same time, temporary or permanent migration, miscarriages, due to malnutrition and poor sanitary conditions, produced an additional reduction in birth rates.

These data show that the famine was intense, but also short in its duration, as evidenced by the sudden increase in the number of births recorded.

2.2. Food distributing authorities. In the second half of the Sixteenth century, food providing authorities were created in most Italian cities. By the first half of the Seventeenth century, their hold on agricultural production had become more systematic (Pult Quaglia 1982, 190). The traumatic 1590-93 experience accelerated this process and brought about the birth of new offices and institutions (Alfani 2010a, 120). In Bologna, for instance, from 1593 onwards every contract dealing

with the cereal trade had to be reported to the local authorities. In the same year in Milan new rules were introduced which remained unaltered till the second half of the Eighteenth century (Parziale 2003, 322; Parziale 2009, 15). As a general rule, farmers could not sell all their products, but were forced to give part of them to the local food provision authorities (Belletini 1987, 77).

Supplying the local population with a sufficient quantity of food was vital to maintaining public order and peace. Riots broke out if there was no grain on the local market or if its price was not affordable (Guenzi 1978, 84; Romani 1983, 1312-1314; Alfani 2010b, 19).

After two consecutive poor harvests, the political authorities in the town of Teramo adopted measures to prevent severe food shortages and so in March 1649 they wrote to the local bishop saying that:

The city is running the risk of finding itself without sufficient food and the problem is exacerbated by the great famine afflicting the rest of the kingdom and by the fact that food providing authorities had not bought enough food to feed the least fortunate citizens such as peasants and the city proletariat (ASDT-9).

Those words provide more information about the efforts made by the town authorities to reduce the mortality rate among the lower classes. According to this document the paucity of resources and unavailability of food had broken the social and political peace within the city. There were widespread rumors that because of the low prices offered by authorities priests and monks preferred to hide their grains in monasteries and convents instead of releasing them. The authorities described the situation as critical because they simply «could not provide enough food and as a consequence the poor starved». For that reason, the local clergy was forced «to reveal the hiding places and sell wheat and other foods at a set price» (ASDT-8).

Such rumors jeopardized public order. In fact, it was not always the actual hunger or lack of food that triggered revolts, but the idea that an injustice was being committed by holding back much needed food (Alfani 2010a, 83).

Despite these efforts, food providing authorities in Teramo simply could not help everyone and as a consequence those least able to help themselves suffered the most. The story of Maria di Giovan Domenico is a case in point. In May 1649, she asked the Civil Court in Teramo for permission to sell a room in her house. Asking for permission was mandatory, since the apartment was part of her dowry and in those days, by law, women did not have full access to their estates. She explained that, since there was a food shortage, her family was at risk of starvation and her children were forced to beg in the streets (AST-1).

Thousands of women, throughout Italy, were forced to sell part of their dowry to avoid starvation. Dowries were an extremely important resource which helped women survive in situations of material deprivation (Hanlon 2007, 114).

As often happened in times of famine, numerous farmers and peasants liquidated part of their properties to pay off creditors and to buy food. In another 1649 notary deed, from the nearby town of Giulianova, a couple stated that «because of

the famine, they took out a loan of 200 ducats to feed their large family». They added that they had worked out a repayment schedule whereby it would take them more than ten years to repay the debt in full (AST-2).

These two documents show how properties were sold or mortgaged in order to avoid starvation during the 1649 famine. This situation was more prevalent in rural areas where there were no municipal authorities to coordinate relief efforts with the result that there was a sudden increase in social and economic inequality.

When creditors could not seize the debtors' properties they often resorted to violence. For instance, the priest don Leonardo Coletti tried in every possible way to get his money back from Angelo di Marco. When Angelo died in 1649, the priest threatened his widow, Lucia, with a «long arquebus». Eventually, Lucia was forced to sign a document in which she promised to repay the priest (ASDT-11). Similar disputes among people became more frequent and often they turned into aggression.

2.3. *Violence.* Banditry was endemic in early modern Europe. Groups of armed men robbed travelers, controlled important routes of communication and burglarized peasants' homes (Ruff 2001, 217-227; Kamen 2000, 192-194). Farmers in isolated areas lived in constant fear of being attacked after dark. In 1647, on a January night, four armed men entered the house of a man called Antonio di Pasquale who lived a few kilometers away from Teramo (ASDT-5). They wrapped him with a blanket, threatened him with an arquebus and took from him fifty Papal ducats, male and female outfits and a gun. Similar episodes were extremely frequent.

During the 1640s the Spanish authorities promulgated ten special laws (*prammatiche*) against banditry. It represented the most important legislative effort to eradicate this social phenomenon since the 1583-97 period, when nine special laws had been enacted (Ambron 2003, 390).

Despite these efforts, criminal bands flourished in periods of political turmoil and economic crisis such as the years 1648-49. According to a witness, questioned by ecclesiastical authorities in Teramo in the year 1649, «many outlaws moved freely across this province kidnapping people both in urban and rural areas» (ASDT-8). Coming across one these bands was so common that people did not dare to travel around the countryside because it had become a sort of no man's land. They were forced to stay in walled towns and villages under the protection of influential and powerful members of the upper classes.

Authorities adopted extremely harsh measures to eradicate such phenomena as the following case clearly shows. In 1649, a band had kidnapped a man in Teramo and was camping a few kilometers away from the city, at the outskirts of the nearby town of Campli. The governor ordered the Campli citizens to take up arms, chase the group of criminals and free the hostage. When encircled, the bandits surrendered to the larger citizen militia. They were put in prison and, after a few days, transferred to another city to be judged. They never reached their destination because, on the way, the Governor decided «to have them killed by his soldiers» (ASDT-7).

When bandits jeopardized public safety, judges were allowed to use a procedure known as *ad modum belli* (as in wartime). At the end of the Sixteenth century,

jurists had written that legal words were useless against the power of weapons. In times of trouble, outlaws were dealt with an iron fist, all their legal protections were lifted and they were hunted down ruthlessly. They could also be executed without trial (Corcione 2002, 47).

A law (*prammatica*), promulgated in 1616 during the reign of Philip III, allowed judges to ignore standard procedure and adopt special measures against those who had committed crimes such as kidnapping, arson and robbery on public streets (Castracane 1991, 27; Vario 1772, 75).

When bandits could not be apprehended, their properties were confiscated and their relatives were expelled from their houses. In August 1649, the Regia Udienza (Royal Court) from the city of Chieti was fighting against a group of bandits led by a man named Giustino Volpe. Some members of the Royal Court wrote that the outlaws had formed «an armed band and moved across the countryside tormenting His Majesty's subjects» (ASC-3).

As a counter measure, the presiding judge compiled a list of the bandits' relatives up to the fourth degree of kinship and deported them to the city of Lucera, more than 200 kilometres south of Chieti. Their properties were sequestered and they were not allowed to return home until the bandits had been killed or arrested.

3. Conclusion. A famine affected every aspect of human life, causing a shock that was at the same time economic, financial, social and psychological (Alfani 2011, 44).

In the first part of the article, I have attempted to show how judicial sources help us investigate the consequences of famines on everyday life. The chronology I have reconstructed matches very well the one provided by Guido Alfani for Northern and Central Italy. The years 1590-93 and 1648-49 were the most catastrophic, while 1607, 1620-22, 1630-31 were years of famine on a smaller scale.

Triggered by climatic adversities and exacerbated by the disorders following the Masaniello uprising in Naples, the 1648-49 famine disrupted the life of communities and, as a consequence, the traditional network of assistance was no longer there. As a result, the number of vagabonds and brigands increased substantially.

The birth rate decreased sharply in Teramo only after the disastrous 1648 harvest. My hypothesis is that the measures put in place by the municipal authorities and the existence of an adequate food supply staved off the worst consequences of the 1647 crop failure.

¹ I have translated this passage and the following quotations.

² Municipal histories, from the Fifteenth century onward, were closely intertwined with political activity (Ciccarelli 2010-2011, 61; Fasano Guarini 2009, 8). Muzii had experienced firsthand the importance of providing the city with a sufficient amount of food because in 1599, he had been a member of the Town Counsel (*Signori del Reggimento*) the body responsible, among other things, for setting the price of bread, oil and for supplying the city with grains.

³ Aurelio Lepre has studied the production of wheat in the farmlands (*masserie*) owned by the Roman College of the Jesuits in northern Apulia

(near the city of Foggia) and found out that their production dropped from the 58,140 tomoli in 1646 to 10,403 in 1647. It recovered to 39,240 in 1648 and only in 1649 the production surpassed that of 1646 reaching 63,810 tomoli. In the nearby farmland of Tressanti (owned by the Certouse of San Martin in Naples) the production fell from 14,058 of 1646 to 5,382 of 1647. In the two following years it reached 8,326 and 14,451 (Lepre 1973, 104-105).

⁴ I have not considered here children labeled *spurii* (born out of wedlock) because very often they were taken to charitable institutions in other jurisdiction or they were simply abandoned.

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|----------|---|
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| AST | Teramo, Archivio di Stato |
| ASC-1: | ASC, Regia Udienza, b. I, fasc. 4, f. 6 r. |
| ASC-2: | ASC, Regia Udienza, b. VI, fasc. 177, f. 3 r-v. |
| ASC-3: | ASC, Regia Udienza, b. XI, fasc. 323, f. 9 v. |
| ASDT-1: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 30, f. 3 r. |
| ASDT-2: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 33, f. 2 r. |
| ASDT-3: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 41, f. 3 r. |
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| ASDT-6: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 136, 39 v. |
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| ASDT-9: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 162, ff. nn. |
| ASDT-10: | ASDT, Fondo Cause, b. 166, f. 2 r. |
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Riassunto

Le carestie in Abruzzo (1590-1650)

L'articolo illustra i primi risultati di una ricerca sulla frequenza delle carestie in Abruzzo negli anni 1590-1650. Il raffreddamento delle temperature, noto come piccola era glaciale, portò a una significativa diminuzione della produzione agricola, a problemi annonari per le città e a una crisi generale del sistema economico. I verbali di processi per diversi crimini celebrati in questo periodo offrono un quadro estremamente dettagliato della vita quotidiana e delle strategie adottate durante le carestie per sopravvivere. Le peggiori crisi alimentari si verificarono negli anni 1590-93 e 1648-49. Solo per questi ultimi anni è possibile fornire dati demografici che indicano il verificarsi di una rapida decrescita delle natalità.

Summary

Famines in the Abruzzi Region (1590-1650)

The article contains preliminary results of a study on the frequency of famines in Abruzzi in the 1590-1650 period. The cooling of the temperatures, also known as The Little Ice Age, brought about a significant reduction in food production, which made supplying towns with enough food problematic, in addition to creating a general and systematic economic crisis. Trial transcripts, relating to a variety of crimes, offer us a highly detailed picture of daily life in that period and of the strategies adopted to survive during famine years. The worst food shortages occurred in the years 1590-93 and in the years 1648-49. Demographic data are available only for the last period and they clearly show that there was a dramatic drop in the birth rate.

Parole chiave

Carestia; Abruzzo; Piccola era glaciale; XVII secolo.

Keywords

Famine; Abruzzi; Little ice age; Seventeenth century.