



SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES DURING THE CONJUNCTURE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Sources and Methods, Dynamics and Representations
(Italy and Europe, c. 1270 - c. 1350)

edited by

Davide Cristoferi



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Socio-Economic Inequalities during the Conjunction of the Fourteenth Century

**Sources and Methods, Dynamics and Representations
(Italy and Europe, c. 1270 - c. 1350)**

edited by Davide Cristoferi

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Socio-economic inequalities during the conjuncture of the fourteenth century: sources and methods, dynamics and representations (Italy and Europe, c. 1270 - c. 1350). An outline

by Davide Cristoferi

Il capitolo discute le caratteristiche, le dinamiche e l'evoluzione delle disuguaglianze socio-economiche durante la congiuntura del Trecento, integrando i principali risultati dei contributi di questo volume con quelli in letteratura. Dopo aver delineato il contesto storiografico del volume, il saggio discute gli obiettivi, l'arco temporale e i concetti ivi utilizzati. Il cuore del capitolo è suddiviso in quattro sezioni, che si concentrano rispettivamente sulle fonti, i parametri e i metodi utilizzati per studiare le disuguaglianze, sulle evidenze quantitative e qualitative riscontrate e sulle percezioni, le rappresentazioni e le risposte all'ineguale distribuzione della ricchezza e delle opportunità nell'Europa occidentale e in Italia centro-settentrionale tra 1270 e il 1347. Il saggio termina riassumendo le dinamiche e le possibili cause dell'evoluzione delle disuguaglianze socio-economiche durante la congiuntura del Trecento.

The chapter discusses the characteristics, dynamics and evolution of socio-economic inequalities during the fourteenth-century conjuncture, integrating the main findings of the essays of this edited volume with further evidence and insights from past and current research. After setting out the historiographical context of the volume, the chapter discusses the aims, timeframe and concepts used. The core of the chapter is then divided into four sections, each focusing on the sources, proxies and methods used to study inequality, the quantitative and qualitative evidence found, and the perceptions, representations and responses to the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity in Western Europe and Central-Northern Italy between 1270 and 1347. The chapter concludes by discussing the development and causalities of the evolution of socio-economic inequalities during the fourteenth-century conjuncture.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Western Europe, Central-Northern Italy, conjuncture, socio-economic inequalities.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Europa occidentale, Italia centro-settentrionale, congiuntura, disuguaglianze economiche e sociali.

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1. Introduction: at the crossroads of two outstanding debates

Economic inequality, social mobility, and poverty have been at the centre of the research agenda of medievalists, economists and economic historians in the last decade.¹ Relevant research programmes and publications, such as those of Piketty, Milanovic, Alfani, Scheidel, Thoen, Benito, Carocci, Feller and others, have been driven by the desire to go beyond previous scientific paradigms and – perhaps even more – to address (directly or indirectly) problems and concerns of the present, especially in the Western world, such as the growth of inequality, the blockage of social mobility, the rising number of super-rich or even the increasing downward shift of middling and poor social groups, often linked to the impact of globalization, pandemics, wars and migration.² As far as preindustrial economic inequality is concerned, an increasing number of sources – tax registers, land registers, probate inventories, dowry and marriage contracts, etc. – have been mobilized and analyzed by scholars in a standardized way, resulting in a large dataset of Gini and/or Theil index measures of wealth concentration in cities, regions and states for the period c. 1350-1800.³ The main result of this massive research effort is to show an almost monotonic concentration of wealth across Europe in the long run, challenging the Kuznets paradigm that links rising inequality to economic growth.⁴ In fact, rising inequality can be observed almost everywhere

¹ This volume, the results of which are presented and discussed here, publishes the proceedings of a panel conference held at the ESSHC of Gothenburg in April 2023 (*Economic Inequality before the Black Death: Sources, Methods and Case-studies (1290-1348)*) and two online seminars held in June and October of the same year (*Socio-Economic Inequalities during the Crisis of the Fourteenth century: Reality and Perceptions (Italy and Europe, 1270-1330)*) as results of the FWO (n. n. 12Z8221N) and FNRS (n. 40005274) funded project EI-MED (2020-6). I would like to thank Thijs Lambrecht and Alexis Wilkin, the appointed supervisors of my research project at Ghent University and the Université libre de Bruxelles for their generous and constant support during these years. I am grateful to all the authors for their original contribution to this editorial adventure and, in particular, to Gabriella Piccinni, Paolo Nanni, Antoni Furió, Chris Briggs and Giacomo Todeschini for their invaluable help in discussing the perspectives and issues of the seminars and their proceedings. I would also like to thank Franco Franceschi and Guido Alfani, who attended the first seminar online and were an important reference for both this volume and my research on economic inequality as well as the anonymous reviewer for the helpful comments provided. In this respect, the responsibility for what follows is mine. Finally, my gratitude goes to the editorial and scientific board of *Reti Medievali E-Book* for accepting this volume in their series.

² Piketty, *Capital*; Milanovic, Lindert, Williamson, “Pre-Industrial Inequality;” Milanovic, *Global Inequality*; Banerjee, Duflo, *Poor economics*; Scheidel, *The Great Leveler*; Alfani, Di Tullio, *The Lion’s share*; Alfani, “Epidemics, Inequality;” Alfani, *As Gods among Men*; Alfani, Thoen, *Inequality in rural Europe*; Carocci, *La mobilità sociale*; Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social mobility*; Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté*; Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà; Ricos y pobres*; Boisseuil, Feller, *Fortunes*.

³ Nigro, *Disuguaglianza economica*; Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Northwestern;” Alfani, Ammannati. “Long-term trends;” Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality;” Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial.”

⁴ Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial,” 19-30; Kuznets, “Economic growth.”

in early modern Europe where the economy was stagnating or growing.⁵ As a result, van Bavel has rightly defined some regions and periods of European (and global) history as “islands of equality in a sea of inequality”.⁶ Moreover, this now consolidated wave of studies raises many questions about the deeper causes of changes in inequality: consistent lower concentrations of wealth in the pre-industrial era have only been observed in the case of major pandemics, such as the Black Death of 1347-52, or prolonged wars and particularly the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48).⁷ At the same time, scholars have discussed the role played in increasing inequality by economic or demographic growth, urbanization as well as by institutions such as regressive taxation, inheritance systems, access to commons, and labour regulations.⁸ In addition, poverty and changes in social mobility have been studied by medievalists as part of the medieval economic growth that Western Europe experienced between the eleventh and late thirteenth centuries, as well as a complex outcome of social hierarchies and marginalization processes.⁹

Before all these studies, the so-called crisis of the fourteenth century was revisited in the years 2004-8 by the extensive research campaign led by Bourin, Carocci, Menant, Drendel and To Figueras, which deconstructed the Postan-Duby paradigm in favour of a complex mosaic of regional socio-economic transformations, both in the North Sea area and, especially, in the north-western Mediterranean.¹⁰ The commercialization of the rural economy, far from being beneficial only to those who have access to the market, turned out to be a relevant factor in shaping production and access to resources, without necessarily leading to economic recession during the first half of the fourteenth century. In this respect, these authors introduced the more balanced term of ‘conjuncture’. In fact, there were areas, social groups and economic activities that were able to benefit from the new economic changes, while others were more or less severely damaged and previous structures transformed.¹¹

⁵ Alfani, Ryckbosch. “Growing apart.”

⁶ van Bavel, “Looking.”

⁷ van Bavel; Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial,” 19-30; Scheidel, *The Great Leveler*. The Thirty Years’ War is the only conflict of medieval and preindustrial Europe for which we have clear evidence of inequality decline: Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Economic Inequality in Pre-industrial.”

⁸ Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial,” 19-34; van Zanden, “Tracing,” van Bavel, “Looking,” Blondé *et al.*, *Inequality*.

⁹ Carocci, *La mobilità sociale*; Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social mobility*; Collavini, Petralia, *La mobilità*; Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté*; for a comprehensive synthesis of recent and less recent research: Fara, “Emarginazione.” See also the proceedings of the 55^o Datini Study Week (2024) on *Social Mobility in pre-industrial societies: tendencies, causes and effects (13th-18th centuries)*.

¹⁰ Bourin, Carocci, Menant, To Figueras, “Les campagnes,” Bourin, Drendel, Menant, *Les disettes*; Bourin, Menant, To Figueras. *Dynamiques*; Drendel, *Crisis*.

¹¹ Bourin, Carocci, Menant, To Figueras, “Les campagnes.” For an important regional case-study (Lombardy): Grillo, Menant, *La congiuntura*. For the Italian peninsula after the Black Death: *Italia 1350-1450*.

It should be noted, however, that the term ‘conjuncture’, which we have also adopted in this edited volume, is generally used by French (*conjoncture*) and Italian (*congiuntura*) medievalists, and not in English or in Spanish historiography of the late Middle Ages, for instance.¹² In Spain, the term *coyuntura* is used to describe a historical situation resulting from a series of defined factors and circumstances over an average period of time (from one generation to around a century), and not necessarily linked to the fourteenth century: this definition and use, as is well known, is mainly due to the influence of the Braudel and *Annales* school and has also spread from French to Italian historiography.¹³ However, the term ‘crisis’ is still used by Spanish scholars to describe the period after the Black Death, although the applicability of the Malthusian explanations is denied contextually due to the low population pressure, or to define specific negative events, such as mortality or food crises.¹⁴ Similarly, for England and the Low Countries, the term ‘crisis’ is also considered by scholars to be the more appropriate even for the pre-Black Death period, without denying the post-Malthusian meaning attributed to it by the above-mentioned research.¹⁵ In addition to the differences in perception, historiography and traditional use of the term ‘conjuncture’, this choice is probably due to the different impact and sequence of adverse events that occurred in the early fourteenth century, such as the Great Famine of 1315-7, between the northern and southern parts of Western Europe.¹⁶ More recently,

¹² See footnotes 10 and 11 above. In Italian historiography, the debate has been open since the 1990s: at a congress in 1993, terms such as ‘crisis’, ‘transformation’ and ‘development’ were used in combination to describe the changes that occurred in Italy between 1350 and 1450: *Italia 1350-1450*, while in 2001 the early fourteenth century was seen as the ‘apogee’ of the development of medieval Mediterranean cities: *Le città del Mediterraneo*. In this volume, for example, the term ‘crisis’ is still used by Palermo and Montanari to describe their case-studies.

¹³ The meaning of the French, Italian, German and Spanish versions of the word ‘conjuncture’ is the same as one of the original meanings of the term in English, introduced from the French in the seventeenth century but then gradually abandoned: *Oxford English Dictionary online*, s.v., “Conjuncture,” Accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.oed.com/search/advanced/Entries?textTermText=conjuncture&dateOfUseFirstUse=false&page=1&sortOption=Frequency>. The use of this term was central to Braudel’s subdivision of historical temporality – in *événement*, *conjuncture* and *structure* – (Braudel, *On History*) meaning it as the tool to study “social history, the history of groups and groupings” and divided into the so-called intermediate conjunctures which include wage and price cycles, rates of industrialization and wars, and long-term conjunctures, which refer to secular changes such as “long-term demographic movements, the changing dimensions of states and empires, the presence or absence of social mobility in a given society, the intensity of industrial growth”: Smith, “Braudel’s temporal rhythms,” 25. A fundamental contribution to disseminate the Braudel’s use and definition of the term in Spanish historiography was made by Vilar, *Iniciación al vocabulario*. Before, the distinction between *konjunktur* and *krise* was also at the core of Wilhelm Abel’s reconstruction of the European medieval and modern agrarian history: Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*.

¹⁴ See, for instance, *Europa en los umbrales*; Iradiel, “De ‘hija de la Pestilencia;” Benito, *Crisis alimentarias* and the chapters of Furió, Almenar Fernández, Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget in this volume. For a reconstruction of the long-term evolution of the use and meaning of the term ‘crisis’ in European historiography until Postan, see: Furió, “La crisis.”

¹⁵ See Drendel, *Crisis*; Drendel, “Introduction.”

¹⁶ See: Bourin, Menant, To Figueras, “Les campagnes européennes;” Bourin, Carocci, Menant, To Figueras, “Les campagnes.”

however, the term ‘conjuncture’ – defined as “unlucky” – it has been used by Bruce Campbell to interpret the fourteenth-century phase of the integrated climatic and socio-economic transition of the medieval world, between the 1270s and 1470s, from efflorescence to instability to recession.¹⁷ Given the different historiographical traditions that we wish to draw upon – mainly converging beyond a Postan-Duby paradigm of the fourteenth century – and taking into account the obvious differences in impact, pace and chronology of the socio-economic changes that occurred during this period, we believe that ‘conjuncture’ is a more appropriate term to describe the full range of transformations that took place across Europe between c. 1270 and c. 1350, and which form the context and one of the two core themes of this volume.

In addition to the debate on the late medieval conjuncture, French and English archaeologists and historians have argued, on the basis of material culture, that – at least from the second half of the fourteenth century, but sometimes even earlier – the period previously regarded as catastrophic was actually an “age of opportunity”, while Italian archaeologists have also recorded positive economic changes, at least in some regions.¹⁸ However, because of the focus on the positive aspects of the expanding late medieval market economy, the extent and depth of the impoverishment of the peasantry and urban workers during this period of peak and transformation has not been widely addressed until recently.¹⁹ In a recent publication the role of labour, credit and the market as triggers of impoverishment, whether permanent or temporary, has been extensively claimed.²⁰ Conversely, if historians have emphasized the positive influence of economic factors on social mobility since the twelfth century, they have also stressed that this leverage gave way to non-economic channels of advancement with the economic downturn around 1300.²¹

However, with a few exceptions, economic inequality has remained largely unexplored in the research agenda on the conjuncture of the fourteenth century, and especially its first phase, until recent years.²² The scarce availability of complete and extended datasets and their uneven geographical coverage before 1347 (Figure 1), may explain this gap, together with the predominance of a longitudinal, i.e. diachronic, approach among economic historians privileging long-term data series where available. In addition, and perhaps also because mainstream economic research correspondingly studies economic inequalities using its own statistical approaches, which often shift the focus from interpreting the sources to interpreting the numbers, historians of the late Middle Ages have probably stayed away from this debate until recent-

¹⁷ Campbell, *The Great*, 399.

¹⁸ Burnouf, *Archéologie médiévale*; Dyer, *An age of transition?*; Hinton, *Archaeology*; Molinari, *La congiuntura*.

¹⁹ Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté*. A relevant exception is: *Ricos y pobres*.

²⁰ Feller, “Introduction;” Carocci, “Conclusioni.” Before, see: Mollat, *Les pauvres*.

²¹ Maire Vigueur, “Conclusions.”

²² For Tuscany: Pinto, “Ricchezza;” Cherubini, “Proprietari.”

ly.²³ Since the last decade, however, economic historians such as Guido Alfani and various research groups of Spanish medievalists have been the first to focus on the levels of economic inequality before the Black Death, for which we now have evidence for Tuscany, Piedmont, Southern France, Germany and the Iberian peninsula, as we will discuss later.²⁴ However, the aim of these studies has often been to measure and explain the declining trend in wealth concentration as a consequence of the Great Plague, rather than to investigate the cause of the high pre-Black Death inequality found. In this respect, an in-depth study of socio-economic inequality during the first phase of the conjuncture of the fourteenth century, i.e. *before 1347*, is still lacking.

The exclusion of economic inequality from the debate on the conjuncture of the fourteenth century and vice versa risks being detrimental to both research agendas. Indeed, if economic growth seems less relevant now as an explanatory factor for economic inequality, things might be different when considering the early fourteenth century. As early as 2015, Gabriella Piccinni, considering the strength and extent of medieval growth, questioned, in the light of the then nascent debate on economic inequality, whether “all Italians benefited from it in the same proportion” or whether “for everyone, whether in the city or in the countryside, this growth was a dispenser of an additional share of well-being and an opportunity for social advancement, or it also brought to some new material and/or moral misery, physical pain, renewed daily fatigue, unprecedented job insecurity, more hunger”.²⁵ In short, whether inequality is actually ‘endogenous’ (and to what extent) to economic growth, as Piketty and Milanovic strongly argue for modern societies by looking at the effects of capitalism and global market integration from 1800 to the present.²⁶ Moreover, in the first half of the fourteenth century, the medieval economy was already undergoing profound changes due to climate transition, disease and warfare, while social change was also exploding with regime changes and popular uprisings such as in the Low Countries.²⁷ It may therefore be the case that socio-economic inequalities were exacerbated during both the economic peak and the transformation of the fourteenth century, in a relationship that is still difficult to disentangle. In this respect, as has been pointed out, the fourteenth century “continues to elude us to a large extent, even though we are increasingly able to ask it the crucial questions”.²⁸

²³ Cf. Ammannati, *Dove va la storia*; Carocci, “Il dibattito,” Grohmann, “Considerazioni.” See also: Hudson, Ishizu, *History by numbers*, XV-XX, 1-22.

²⁴ See: Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Northwestern;” Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends;” Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality;” Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” Alfani, “Epidemics;” Furió *et al.*, “Measuring economic inequality;” Morelló Baget *et al.*, “A study;” Carvajal *et al.*, *La desigualdad económica*.

²⁵ Piccinni, “All’apogeo,” 384, translation from Italian by the author.

²⁶ Piketty, *Capital*; Milanovic, *Global Inequality*.

²⁷ Bourin, Cherubini, Pinto, *Rivolte*.

²⁸ Carocci, “Il dibattito,” 29, translation from Italian by the author.

2. This collective study: objectives, definitions and structure

The aim of this volume is to bring together, discuss and further develop the findings and perspectives of these two areas of research – the fourteenth-century conjuncture and pre-industrial economic inequality – through eighteen original and state-of-the-art contributions in English and Italian by established scholars and promising young researchers on socio-economic inequalities in Central-Northern Italy and Western Europe between c. 1270 – c. 1350. More specifically, the volume aims to a) understand how and to what extent medieval society was unequal in the seventy years before the Great Plague of 1347-52. This is central to b) exploring and discussing the causal mechanisms of socio-economic inequalities for this specific context but also on a more general level. Finally, c) to examine how socio-economic inequalities were perceived, represented and dealt with by contemporary medieval societies. Each objective is addressed in a specific section of the volume. In this respect, the volume does not aim to exhaust the topic, but rather to lay the foundations and pave the way for further analyses through a careful choice of scope and time frame which we can summarize in the following four points.

First (1), concerning the concept of inequality we use. By socio-economic inequalities, we mean the unequal distribution of wealth and/or income among groups and individuals, as well as of status and opportunity in a given society, according to the *Encyclopaedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*.²⁹ This dual concept allows us to address the manifold phenomenon of inequality in a more comprehensive way. On the one hand, we can study the inequality of specific “material dimensions of human well-being”, such as income and wealth, and examine its structure, dynamics and causes.³⁰ On the other hand, we can explore the complex web of ‘capabilities’ and ‘entitlements’, which in turn are shaped by factors such as formal and informal institutions, mentality and customs, and the unequal concentration of economic variables, all of which contribute to affecting access to income and wealth, but also to food and other goods fundamental to human development as elaborated by Amartya Sen.³¹ Moreover, the latter concept can be further integrated with the study of the “economic rationality of the poor” by Nobel laureates such as Banerjee and Duflo, which is particularly helpful in focusing on the lives, aspirations and needs of the people of the lower deciles of a distribution and the socio-economic mechanisms of the so-called ‘poverty trap’.³²

²⁹ Kamalvanshi, Kushwaha, “Economic Inequality.”

³⁰ Alfonso, LaFleur, Alarcó, “Concepts of Inequality.”

³¹ Alfonso, LaFleur, Alarcó; Sen, *Resources*, 497: “entitlements are the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces”. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “The Capability Approach,” substantive revision December 10, 2020: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach/>: “capabilities are the real freedoms that people have to achieve their potential doings and beings”.

³² Banerjee, Duflo, *Poor economics*. See also: *La ricerca*.

All these concepts are considered by the contributors to this volume to be central to a better understanding of the perennial phenomenon of inequality, all the more so in a context characterized by social hierarchies and constraints, as well as the onset of profound economic and demographic changes, such as those experienced by Western European society since the end of the thirteenth century. The choice of this precise chronological, geographical and cultural space (2) is non-trivial for two reasons: firstly, as mentioned above, it provides an original and coherent, albeit varied, case-study of socio-economic inequalities, that, as said, remained unexplored until recently before the Black Death. Secondly, the paucity of serial written sources and the often incomplete nature of the few that are available force us – in order to study inequality – to be both inventive and cautious at the same time in terms of the records, the parameters and the methods we use, to be comprehensive in terms of both quantitative and qualitative analyses, and to be interdisciplinary, with particular reference to archaeology and statistics, for example.³³

This synchronic and interdisciplinary approach, beyond its statistical application, is at the heart of the whole volume and has several advantages, as the six chapters in the first section on *Sources, proxies and methods* clearly demonstrate. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, by focusing on punctual observations and short-term trends as well as on archaeological sources, they are able to overcome the gaps in the archival record and in the geographical coverage of cities or areas such as England, Bruges, Tuscany and more specifically Siena and its countryside, Tortosa, and the Valencian countryside.³⁴ Indeed, each contributor to this volume rightly has his or her own area of expertise, research interests and intellectual preferences: this is evident, for example, in the chronology used. While the proposed time-frame is indeed between 1270 and 1347, i.e. when European society was at a turning point between its economic and demographic peak and its imminent decline or transformation, some authors have extended their analyses beyond the Black Death in order to detect, for example, a trend or change in the distribution of wealth as well as in economic and socio-political opportunities or mentality.³⁵

However, focusing mainly on the period before the Black Death (3) allows us to further question the causes and mechanisms of socio-economic inequalities. For example, we can ask whether the mechanisms behind the rise in economic inequality were the same (or not) before and after an epochal event such as the Great Plague.³⁶ How unequal was the distribution of wealth

³³ See for instance Blondé *et al.*, *Inequality*.

³⁴ See the chapters of Orecchioni, Briggs, Geens, Cristoferi, Palermo, Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget, Almenar Fernández. Missing from this section is a contribution on the statistical tools developed to measure inequality in early fourteenth-century England. See also: Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality.”

³⁵ See the chapters of Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget, Almenar Fernández, Feller, Furió, Montanari, Poloni, Nico Ottaviani, Nanni.

³⁶ For a discussion: Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial,” 19-34.

and opportunities within medieval society at its peak – and we all know that medieval economic and demographic growth was the greatest Europe had ever experienced before the Industrial Revolution.³⁷ In this respect, whether or not the Kuznetsian paradigm of growth and redistribution applies to this period or to some areas, to what extent, and up to what point.³⁸ Or, conversely, whether Piketty's argument – based on the mismatch between (higher) rates of return on capital and (lower) rates of economic growth, which the economist believes to be valid for the preindustrial period as well – could apply to at least some of the evidence of economic inequality found in the first half of the fourteenth century, when economic growth appears to have slowed.³⁹ Finally, whether there is a direct relationship between socio-economic inequalities in the early fourteenth century and the degree of resilience of rural and urban society to pandemics such as the Black Death or famines such as that of 1315-7.⁴⁰

The seven chapters of the second section – focusing on *Contexts, dynamics and causalities* – are not intended to provide an exhaustive answer to all these questions, but at least to contribute to a better assessment of them – as I will resume in the following pages – by exploring the dynamic evolution of socio-economic inequalities and their biunivocal relationship with other variables. These are poverty and impoverishment, demography, property relations and agrarian contracts, land distribution, famine and access to rural and urban food markets, social mobility and political representation. Furthermore, these dynamics were compounded for women by the high unequal gender structure of medieval society.⁴¹ The chapters zoom in and out from a broader Western European perspective to the Iberian Peninsula, to regions such as the Southern Low Countries or Italian Romagna, or to individual cities such as Florence and Rome.⁴² From this broad perspective, however, the volume regrettably lacks a chapter on a relevant factor in early fourteenth-century urban inequality, namely the institutions, labour regulations and organization of the guilds and of the 'industrial' sector, especially the textile production.⁴³ Other relevant causal factors to be considered are also the impact of warfare and war economy and of regressive taxation: in this respect, some insights

³⁷ See Piccinini, "All'apogeo" and *La crescita*.

³⁸ For later period: van Zanden, "Tracing;" Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," 19-34.

³⁹ Piketty, *Capital*, part 1, also for preindustrial period; Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," 19-34.

⁴⁰ Curtis, *Coping*, chapter 4. Historians have focused on the redistributive consequences of epidemics rather than the resilience of unequal societies to them: Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality;" van Bavel, "Looking."

⁴¹ See the chapter of Feller and Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà*.

⁴² See the chapters of Feller, Furió, Specke and Lambrecht, Montanari, Wilkin, Poloni.

⁴³ Missing from this section is a paper on the internal hierarchies of guilds and the organisation of work in the cities of Central-Northern Italy, presented at the preparatory seminar in June 2023. See also: Franceschi, "Mobilità;" Franceschi, "Salariato."

from past and current research can nevertheless be made, as they are presented in the following pages.⁴⁴

Finally, the urban society of Central-Northern Italy (4), already a point of reference for the study of inequality and the fourteenth-century conjuncture, offers one of the best case-studies for cross-referencing (and thus going beyond) the measurement and explanation of socio-economic inequalities with the way they were represented, perceived and, eventually, accepted or dealt with by contemporary medieval society and its own members. This is indeed the subject of the five chapters in the last section of the volume – which focuses on *Perceptions, representations and responses*: by looking at this triad, these contributions do not intend to offer a mere counterpart – that of ‘immaterial perception’ – to the ‘material reality’ of inequalities. On the contrary, by examining the written, visual and material languages used, the political discourses, the sumptuary laws and the welfare policies enacted in the early fourteenth-century Italian urban society, these chapters remind us once again that even the sources we use to quantify, for example, the distribution of an economic variable are not neutral, but at the very moment they describe such an unequal reality, whether they intend to or not, they also contribute to creating, framing, certifying and justifying it and to activating processes of exclusion/inclusion, marginalization or, even recognition and alleviation.⁴⁵ Such an awareness is seen as fundamental both to a correct epistemology of our sources and data, and to a reconsideration of the whole Kuznetsian argument about the positives of inequality. In addition, this focus can provide more insights to a research field now central in the debate of modern and contemporary inequality: the social awareness, reproduction and justification of socio-economic differentiations.⁴⁶

The focus on Central-Northern Italy, nevertheless, reminds us of a final regrettable omission, namely the limited geographical scope of the volume on the Italian Peninsula, which is limited to the areas above Rome (Figure 1). Southern Italy, recently included in the quantitative research on economic inequality for the early modern period, still awaits a combined analysis on the distribution of wealth and opportunities in the last centuries of the Middle Ages with the recent advances in the study of social mobility.⁴⁷ However, we do hope that the different approaches and perspectives presented here can inspire future research in this direction.

⁴⁴ Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” van Bavel, “Looking;” Scheidel, *The Great*.”

⁴⁵ See the chapters of Todeschini, Piccinni, Mucciarelli, Nico Ottaviani, Nanni. For a general discussion: Todeschini, *Les Marchands*. For some case-studies: Gravela, *Certifying*; Vallerani, “Certificare;” Lambrecht, “*Si Grant*.”

⁴⁶ Tilly, *Durable Inequality*; Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*; Milanovic, *Visions of Inequality*; Banerjee, Duflo, *Poor economics*.

⁴⁷ See: Alfani, Sardone, “Long-term trends.” Concerning social mobility in late medieval Southern Italy, see the contributions in Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social Mobility*: Senatore, Terenzi, “Aspects of Social Mobility;” De Divitiis, “Architecture;” Silvestri, “Social Mobility.”

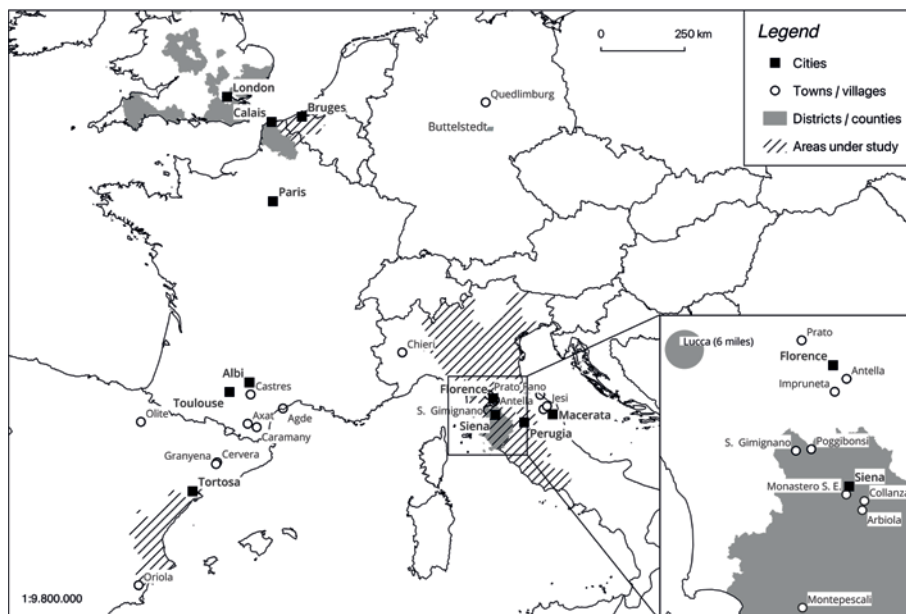


Figure 1. Fiscal sources in Europe before the Black Death and areas studied in this volume (c. 1250-1347): geographical distribution
Sources: elaboration of the author from the EI-MED database.

Following this introduction, the chapter presents a summary of the main findings of this collective study according to the structure of the volume. However, in order to provide a more comprehensive state of the art, for each section I also add further evidence and insights from past and current research, especially as it relates to measures of economic inequality. In doing so, I will focus first on *Sources, proxies and methods* (3), then on *Quantitative* (4) and *Qualitative evidence* of inequality in rural and urban areas (5). Finally, I will discuss *Perceptions, representations and responses* to inequality in Central-Northern Italian cities (6). In the concluding remarks (7), I will summarize the volume's hypotheses on the evolution and causalities of socio-economic inequality during the late Middle Ages.

3. Sources, proxies and methods

Throughout the pre-industrial period, and even more so before the Black Death, written sources rarely allow us to measure inequalities, and even when they do so locally, we are usually far from obtaining general data (Figure 1).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Piccinni, "All'apogeo," 382-3.

In this respect, as the chapters in the first part of this volume show, there are several possible research methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, which in turn imply the use of a range of different sources and proxies, in order to cope with the lack of data and to exploit those that are available.

The most common method is to make the best use of the few serial sources available, mainly to reconstruct Gini indexes of distribution, as has been done extensively for the whole of the pre-industrial period. By providing a standardized coefficient between 0 (equality) and 1 (maximum inequality), the Gini index is particularly useful as it allows case-studies that differ in chronology, geography and sources to be compared. Together with its graphical representation, the so-called Lorenz curve, and the ranking of a distribution into deciles, is the most widely used standardized measure of concentration.⁴⁹ Other – less widely used but often integrated to the Gini – measures of dispersion are the Theil and the Palma indexes.⁵⁰ While this statistical approach clearly has its advantages – first and foremost because it makes it possible to exploit and compare what could be exploited and compared – it is not without its problems. In fact, the typology of wealth or income taken into account and the amount of information available in the source may introduce some distortions – often combined with the different sensitivity of each coefficient to certain elements of a distribution – of which users should be aware.⁵¹ For example, as Chris Briggs has shown in his contribution, Gini measures derived from English lay subsidies – based on wealth recorded above a minimum threshold – or income distributions produced by social tables can be misleading at the micro level because they focus on either land or movable assets in isolation, whereas the income structure of the lower strata of English society was more complex and perhaps their condition less harsh than the high Ginis found could indicate.⁵² Moreover, if it is true that immovable property, and land in particular, has been the main driver of wealth inequality in pre-industrial period and can cautiously be used as a proxy for income inequality – also because it is often the only one available – it is undisputed that wealth inequality is generally higher than income inequality.⁵³ In this respect, comparison of wage levels, are still of great interest, although particularly difficult for the scarcity of data and for their representativeness.⁵⁴

Once these distortions have been taken into account, another problem is the often-incomplete nature of the available sources. To the best of my knowl-

⁴⁹ Cowell, *Measuring Inequality*, 26-37.

⁵⁰ The Theil index measures an entropic ‘distance’ the population is away from the ‘ideal’ egalitarian state of everyone having the same income. The Palma ratio is a measure of inequality that divides the share received by the richest 10% by the share of the poorest 40%: Cowell, 53-61.

⁵¹ For instance, the Gini index is more sensitive to transfers from a wealthier household to one in the lower portion of the distribution than it is when the recipient is in the middle of the distribution: Cowell, 26-30.

⁵² See the chapter of Briggs.

⁵³ Malanima, “Ineguaglianze,” 5, 14-8.

⁵⁴ For a discussion: De Keizer, “How was City Life?” For an example: Tognetti, “Attività.”

edge, there are about fifty serial sources, mainly property tax records, available in European archives or already edited for over thirty among cities, towns and villages, and sometimes for larger regions such as Artois and seventeen English counties, between 1250 and 1347, as shown in Figure 1. These sources are generally fiscal records such as property tax rolls (lay subsidies in England, *tailles* in France), property tax records (*estimi*, *compoix*, *manifests* in the north-western Mediterranean...), cadasters or land tax (such as in Siena or in Flanders), feudal surveys (such as the *enquêtes* in Southern France), house tax records (*häuserverzeichnis* in Germany), tax rolls redistributing quotas of forced loans and annuities (such as in Florence and Bruges).⁵⁵ This list could probably be extended to include other sources, especially forced loans. However, only a few of all the property tax records are complete or almost complete: most of them, such as the *estimi* available for a few villages in Central Italy, are only fragments or have lost at least half of their content.⁵⁶ Even where these sources have survived almost in their entirety, they do not record all the households or even all the landowners. Propertyless, for obvious reasons, are generally excluded from tax lists as are privileged categories such as religious institutions and the clergy, the nobility and the ruler, be it the monarch, the lord and their family or a city-commune. As a result, a significant proportion of the wealth is often not accounted for.⁵⁷

Guido Alfani and Sam Geens have tested different solutions to this kind of problem. For early fourteenth-century Bruges, the latter has identified the top one per cent taxpayers of forced loans and then analyzed the changes in inequality within this group. Although it is not necessarily representative of the differences found in the population as a whole this group appears more regularly in the sources while the accumulation of wealth at the top, as already tested by scholars, increases “the potential for surplus extraction and thus the potential for rising economic inequality”.⁵⁸ For Florence, on the other hand, Geens has also worked in his PhD dissertation with an incomplete forced loan, from which he was able to extrapolate the distribution of wealth for the entire Florentine population in 1325 by using a statistical method for modelling left-truncated income data.⁵⁹ This method was first developed and tested by Alfani and García Montero on the English lay subsidies for the period 1290-1319 and 1327-32, which, as previously noted, are tax rolls based on wealth recorded above a minimum threshold and thus only consider the mid-

⁵⁵ Database of the author: I would like to thank Sam Geens and Thijs Lambrecht for providing relevant integrations to this list. See also the chapter of Cristoferi, Furió, Geens, Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget in this volume and Ammannati, “La disuguaglianza;” Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Northwestern;” Alfani, Ammannati. “Long-term trends;” Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality;” Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial.”

⁵⁶ Ammannati, “La disuguaglianza.”

⁵⁷ See: Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial Europe.”

⁵⁸ See the chapter of Geens.

⁵⁹ Geens, “A Golden Age,” 265-7.

dle and richest side of a distribution.⁶⁰ Indeed, as all these authors acknowledge, this approach depends on making some *a priori* assumptions about the shape of the distribution, which remain controversial in recent literature. However, the main advantage of the method is that, once these assumptions have been made, it requires no additional information other than an estimate of the population covered and allows the use of otherwise quantitatively unusable sources, such as those that do not cover households below a certain wealth threshold. In this case, however, the method is useful for providing rough estimates rather than precise measurements. A similar process, with milder problems, is when we also need to add the propertyless to a distribution, which means, if it is possible to estimate such a number, simply adding the appropriate number of ‘zeros’ to the distribution. The most common alternative, and one that is widely used in many other cases, is to remove the propertyless from each sample in order to create a more coherent database: this has been calculated to have a 20% reduction effect on the Gini coefficient for late medieval and early modern Florentine tax records. However, as pointed out in the chapter on Siena, the range of reduction can also vary from 5 to 15%.⁶¹

Once we have more complete sources, however, we should overcome another problem specific to the pre-Black Death period, namely the lack of subsequent serial records, which usually hinders the reconstruction of the evolution of inequality and, consequently, the study of its causes. The chapter by Miquel and Morelló on the Catalan city of Tortosa reiterates the longitudinal, i.e. diachronic, approach used elsewhere for the pre-industrial period. The two authors do this thanks to the recent rediscovery of a property tax record from 1316, which is then compared with the other earliest and most complete *manifest* known to date, that of 1353. In this way, they have been able to present the only data on economic inequality *before* and *after* the Black Death found for a city on the Iberian Peninsula (including the propertyless) and, consequently, to discuss the redistributive effects of the Great Plague.⁶² Moreover, this longitudinal approach has only been possible for a few other urban and rural settlements in Europe, such as Toulouse, Albi, Prato and three villages in Tuscany.⁶³

The methodology I used in my contribution on Siena is conversely cross-sectional, i.e. synchronous: the lack of other comparable observations for one of the earliest and most complete surviving medieval cadasters could be overcome by comparing the results of the statistical analyses carried out on this source with those available for other areas in the same period.⁶⁴ Al-

⁶⁰ Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality.”

⁶¹ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1094-5. See the chapter of Cristoferi.

⁶² See the chapter of Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget.

⁶³ Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial,” 17-8; Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1094-5.

⁶⁴ See the chapter of Cristoferi.

though this approach does not allow us to detect a trend in inequality, it does allow us to increase the data available for the period before the Black Death, to study the structure and some causal mechanisms of late medieval economic inequality in the Sienese context, to measure the representativeness of the other available observations for Tuscany and even Europe as we will see in the following section.

However, when fiscal records are not available – as is often the case – we have to look for other, more complete and extended written sources to apply quantitative analyses. For the Iberian Peninsula this research has led to exploit two different kind of sources: the first are the so-called *libros de repartimiento* (distribution books) which record the allocations made to Christian settlers during the colonization process that followed the great conquests of the thirteenth-fifteenth century and show the relevance of demography and access to land in shaping inequality, as suggested by Antoni Furió.⁶⁵ The second records are private sources such as wills, probate inventories, dowries and marriage contracts. The study of probate inventories – whose distribution in time and space is also far from homogeneous – although particularly time-consuming, can generally provide a proxy of wealth and even detailed evidence of its composition (land, house, animals, cash, furniture, objects, ornaments...), but not for all social groups and only for a small sample of the total population. However, Luis Almenar's chapter demonstrates that it can also be successfully applied to early fourteenth-century Iberia, for which tax records are almost non-existent, to explore inequality: in this respect, he zooms in on Valencian peasants, the “bulk of medieval society”, to analyze the distribution of landed property – as a proxy of wealth – before and after the Black Death.⁶⁶

Because of the limitations of quantitative analysis mentioned above, a more qualitative approach must also be taken into account, using different kinds of parameters that can be identified in late medieval society and in the sources that produced it. In this respect, cross-referencing standards of living, levels of consumption and, more generally, proxies of entitlements and capabilities, seem to have great potential. For example, Maïka de Keyzer has recently questioned wage series as a reliable welfare indicator for the past, proposing a broader analytical framework inspired by the Human Development Index and a closer examination of household living standards.⁶⁷ Gabriella Piccinni, on the other hand, has developed her own argument on the correlation between medieval growth and inequality, using as proxies the deterioration of working and living conditions in the city and the countryside, the difficulties of access to food, the increasing differentiation of the housing market, the growing number of poor and the formalization of inequality in

⁶⁵ See the chapter of Furió.

⁶⁶ See the chapter of Almenar Fernández.

⁶⁷ De Keizer, “How was City Life?”

sumptuary laws.⁶⁸ Laurent Feller, by focusing on poverty intended “as the material expression of inequality”, shows that this was reflected “in destitution, poor diet, poor quality clothing, mediocre housing and poor protection from the cold and weather” from one side, and to “attitudes of ostentation” of the rich from the other, as well as by, indirectly, the spread of charitable institutions since the thirteenth century on.⁶⁹ In the context of this volume, it should be noted that access to food still seems to be the most valuable and feasible parameter, albeit inevitably complex, to verify the level of inequality within a medieval society, whether urban or rural. It is not without reason that seven of the chapters refer directly or indirectly to access to food as a proxy for inequality and to the regulation of food markets as a way of highlighting, shaping and reinforcing socio-economic inequalities across medieval society.⁷⁰

Finally, material evidence such as ceramics, archeozoological findings, metal artefacts, anthropometric analyses, architectural elements or building materials have not yet been fully integrated by historians in their analyses of inequality in the late Middle Ages, despite their possible geographical and chronological coverage: all this makes the research avenues discussed by Paola Orecchioni in her contribution of extreme interest.⁷¹ Indeed, since the changes that took place during this period seem to have had a profound impact on the material conditions of people, the study of archaeological sources must certainly be developed whether or not written sources are available. In this respect, the author addresses the issue of inequalities by looking at the differentiation in consumption – through ceramics – and diet – by designing a global approach using ceramics, anthropometric and isotopic analyses, and archeozoological and archaeobotanical evidence as proxies – showing the potentiality of this method with data from excavations in Tuscany, Sicily, England and France.

4. *Quantitative evidence: measures and trend*

The different approaches described above, once applied, consistently indicate that socio-economic inequalities were extremely high in the early fourteenth century. In this respect, the quantitative evidence now available for medium and large urban centres between 1270 and 1347 is clear, once the coefficients are taken as representative not of absolute values but of general patterns. It is enough to integrate the two case-studies of this volume, such as Tortosa (1316: Gini index = 0,720) and Siena (1318: 0,788), together

⁶⁸ Piccinni, “All’apogeo.”

⁶⁹ See the chapter of Feller, translation from Italian by the author.

⁷⁰ See the chapters of Orecchioni, Feller, Speecke and Lambrecht, Palermo, Wilkin, Mucciarelli and Nanni.

⁷¹ See the chapter of Orecchioni for an overview of archaeological research on inequality, including for non-medieval and non-European contexts. See also: *Construire*.

with those of San Gimignano (also with the countryside, 1277: 0,712), Perugia (1288: 0,706), Chieri (1311: 0,715), Quedlinburg (1320, 0,463), Prato (1325, 0,703), Florence (1325, reconstructed distribution: 0,743), London (1280-1319: observed distribution = 0,761; reconstructed distribution with poorest strata = 0,961; 1327-32: observed distribution = 0,664; reconstructed distribution with poorest strata = 0,953), the bourg of Toulouse (1335: 0,752), Albi (1343, 0,637) and Cherasco (quarter of San Martino, 1347: 0,614).⁷² In fact, nine out of thirteen of these observations have Gini coefficients above 0,700, while three others are between 0,614 and 0,664: still a high figure.⁷³ Only the German city of Quedlinburg has a Gini coefficient below 0,500. Moreover, in Bruges between 1296 and 1348, for which no Gini reconstructions are available, it was observed that “the super-rich contributed a fifth of the elite taxes in this period and the average household possessed about 1,5 times more fiscal wealth than the poorest member of the top one per cent”, suggesting a similar pattern of distribution to that found in all the other urban centres.⁷⁴

Outside the cities, in suburbs and rural areas, economic inequalities are more varied but slightly high too. Again, most of the evidence comes from Alfani and Ammannati's research on Tuscany, such as for the rural hinterland of San Gimignano (1290: 0,674), the Florentine settlements of Impruneta (1307: 0,462; 1330: 0,556), Antella (1319: 0,452) and Poggibonsi (1338: 0,550), the rural and suburban districts around Lucca (1331: respectively 0,544 and 0,620), then integrated by new data from three Siennese villages in 1320-5 studied in this volume: the suburb of Monastero Sant'Eugenio (0,565), the hamlets of Arbiola and Collanza (0,609) and the community of Montepescali (0,681).⁷⁵ In general, the concentration of wealth ranges between 0,452 and 0,681, with eight out of ten observations above 0,500, the threshold over which inequality is usually considered to be high.⁷⁶ Similarly, new evidence also suggests an unequal pattern of distribution outside rural Tuscany: for example, the concentration of land in only a section of Valencian rural society – that of the peasant class – between 1283 and 1350 has a Gini coefficient of 0,420, which rises to 0,790 if landless agriculturalists are taken into account.⁷⁷ In Thuringia, where tax records from before the Black Death (1333) have been preserved

⁷² Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” Alfani, “Economic Inequality in Northwestern;” Alfani, Ammannati. “Long-term trends;” Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality;” Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;” Ammannati, “La Peste Nera;” Grohmann, *Città*. Unless otherwise stated, Gini coefficients are calculated excluding the propertyless.

⁷³ Considering only the two distributions observed and not reconstructed for London.

⁷⁴ See the chapter of Geens.

⁷⁵ See the chapter of Cristofori and Alfani, Ammannati. “Long-term trends;” Ammannati, “La Peste Nera.” Gini coefficients are calculated excluding the propertyless.

⁷⁶ Malanima, “Ineguaglianze,” 8.

⁷⁷ See the chapter of Almenar Fernández.

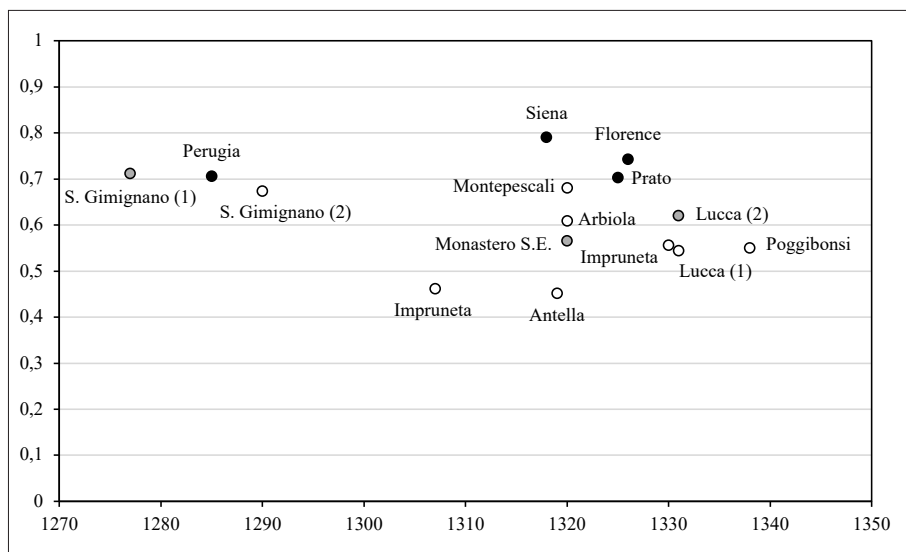


Figure 2. *Economic inequality in Tuscany and Perugia (1277-1338): Gini indexes*

Note: black dots = cities; grey dots = suburbs or rural-urban settlements; white dots = rural settlements. *San Gimignano (1)*: including the *contado*, excluding institutions; *San Gimignano (2)*: *contado* only; Lucca (1): rural districts (*pivieri*) within a 6 miles radius from the city (6 *miglia*); Lucca (2): suburban districts (*comuni*) within a 6 miles radius from the city (6 *miglia*). Sources: Antella, Impruneta, Poggibonsi, Prato, San Gimignano=Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," 1082-4; Florence = Geens, "A Golden Age," 266-7 and Appendix, 103-4; Lucca = Ammannati, "La Peste Nera," 33; Arbiola and Collanza, Monastero Sant'Eugenio, Montepescali = see the article of the author in this volume; Perugia = Grohmann, *Città*, 134; Siena = see the article of the author in this volume.

for seven German parishes in the bailiwick of Buttelstedt, the Gini coefficients range from 0,470 to 0,705, with five above 0,500.⁷⁸

The figure for both urban and rural areas is even more evident if we focus on the best reported case-study at regional level, namely Tuscany (to which we add the city of Perugia, Figure 2). This region has the most extensive data series, which is concentrated for a shorter period (1277-1338) than the full sample presented above and in the most homogeneous way, without taking into account propertyless and institutions and on the basis of similar sources.⁷⁹ Figure 2 accordingly shows that wealth concentration was indeed extremely high in the cities and still high but less so in the countryside, with suburbs or bigger villages in between. However, suburbs with characteristics

⁷⁸ See Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," Appendix: the parishes of the district of Buttelstedt are: Bachstedt (0,470); Daasdorf (0,705); Großobringen (0,476); Hottelstedt (0,629); Oberndorf (0,521); Ottmannshausen (0,680); Schwerstedt (0,590).

⁷⁹ For the differences between the Florentine and Luccese *estimi*, the *libra* of Perugia and the *Tavola* of Siena: Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," Ammannati, "La Peste Nera," Grohmann, *Città*, 69-152; and the chapter of Cristoferi.

halfway between urban and rural may also hide higher inequality than is shown in the graph.⁸⁰ This pattern is confirmed also for England, where the coefficient of distribution of movable property across fifteen counties – that is, including towns and rural settlements together – in 1327-32 ranges from 0,325 (Staffordshire) to 0,470 (Kent) if we look at the observed distributions (based on partial data), while it rises to between 0,455 (Devon) and 0,798 (Kent) if we look at the reconstructed distribution (including the poorest strata). London has in both cases the highest inequality.⁸¹ Moreover, the English data are also useful to show an inter-regional variation in distribution, which can only be guessed at by comparing the Florentine and Sienese coefficients. In this respect, the English and Tuscan case-study show from one side that wealth inequality was extremely high between 1270 and 1347, from the other that such unequal distribution can also consistently vary across regions or between city and countryside and even within the same urban center.⁸²

Having assessed the general figure for the samples, we should also ask whether it is possible to detect a trend in the evolution of the distribution of wealth (or income) within the period under consideration and beyond on the basis of the information available so far. In this respect, the Iberian Peninsula, despite its originality in the late medieval European context, can provide some interesting hints about the long-term trend of inequality in rural areas between thirteenth and fourteenth century.⁸³ In the Navarrese town of Olite wealth inequality was above a Gini index of 0,500 for the two observations available in 1244 and 1264, higher than the land concentration for the town of Oriola (1308-14) in Mediterranean Iberia.⁸⁴ However, this evidence was probably lower than that we can infer by the measures of land concentration calculated for the Valencian peasants between 1283 and 1350.⁸⁵

Once we look at other contexts, however, the trend of distribution appears as less linear and more wavering, especially between 1300-50. For example, between 1280-1319 and 1327-32, some English counties “experienced a significant decline in inequality whereas other communities [including London] witnessed stability or a slight increase”.⁸⁶ In Bruges, we observe a peak in inequality among the top 1% of taxpayers after the first Franco-Flemish War, then a decrease and a new rise between 1320-40.⁸⁷ In Florentine Tuscany, moreover, “different trajectories can even be found in neighbouring localities. Between the last quarter of the thirteenth century and 1332, wealth differ-

⁸⁰ See the chapter of Cristofori.

⁸¹ Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality,” 16-9. The same pattern is also confirmed for the Iberian peninsula in the fifteenth century: see the chapter of Furió.

⁸² Alfani, García Montero and the chapter of Cristofori.

⁸³ Concerning the economic and demographic specificities of the Iberian Peninsula in medieval Europe, see the chapters of Furió and Almenar Fernández.

⁸⁴ See the chapter of Furió.

⁸⁵ See the chapter of Almenar Fernández.

⁸⁶ See the chapter of Geens and Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth inequality,” 17-8.

⁸⁷ See the chapter of Geens.

ences declined by almost a third in the countryside of San Gimignano while it increased by five per cent in the city”.⁸⁸ Conversely, in the rural village of Impruneta – the only settlement for which we have up to three observations before 1348 – inequality has a Gini of c. 0,450 in 1307, then falls slightly in 1319 and rises to 0,556 in 1330.⁸⁹ This last tendency might also be supported by the other observations charted in Figure 2, which show a concentration of high unequal patterns of distribution in the years 1320-30.

Finally, as regards the impact of the Black Death on the distribution of wealth, the evidence found, especially for the Iberian Peninsula, does not always confirm the pattern already observed in Tuscany, Piedmont, Germany and Southern France (and suggested also by the scattered evidence about income distribution), where inequality generally decreases in both urban and rural areas.⁹⁰ In post-Black Death Bruges, the decline in fiscal inequality among the richest 1% suggests a broader trend in urban society as a whole.⁹¹ Conversely, in Mediterranean Iberia, wealth concentration increases after 1348, whether we look at the taxed households of a medium-sized town or at a sample of peasants. By 1353, wealth had fallen by 14,5% and was slightly more unequally distributed in Tortosa than in 1316. Interestingly, women, who made up only 20% of the taxable population there, followed a different pattern: inequality among them also increased, but less markedly than among the male population, while they accumulated more wealth on average than in 1316, unlike men.⁹² Among Valencian peasants, the Gini coefficient increased from 0,42 to 0,47. In both the Tortosa and the Valencia cases, the increase in inequality is due to a greater concentration of wealth among the richer classes of the urban and rural population, as part of the redistributive effects of the plague, but also to the new mechanisms of enrichment that the epidemics favoured.⁹³ Indeed, a more complex pattern for the post-Black Death period can also be argued for other case-studies, whether in the trend or in the still high levels of inequality found in the second half of the fourteenth century. In Impruneta, for example, inequality, which fell after 1348, did not fall further after the *pestis secunda* of 1363, but actually began to rise again until the epidemic wave of 1400.⁹⁴ In the German part of the Holy Roman Empire, cities such as Esslingen (1362: 0,755), Frankfurt am Main (1354: 0,766) and Munich (1369: 0,747) also experienced high levels of economic inequality after the Black Death (but no data are available for the period before 1348), with Gini coefficients declining but remaining well above 0,598 until 1500. The only town for which we have observations of wealth inequality before and af-

⁸⁸ See the chapter of Geens and Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1083-4.

⁸⁹ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1090-1; Alfani, “Epidemics,” 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ See the chapter of Geens.

⁹² See the chapter of Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget.

⁹³ See the chapter of Almenar Fernández.

⁹⁴ Alfani, “Epidemics,” 8-9.

ter the Black Death is Quedlinburg, which seems to confirm this decline (from 0,463 in 1320 to 0,396 in 1525), albeit with a lower starting level of inequality and with a large gap between the two data points. Similarly, in the county of Wertheim, 63% of the rural villages for which tax records are available for the period 1350-1400 show Ginis below 0,500.⁹⁵

5. Qualitative evidence: contexts, dynamics and causalities

The structure and trend of distribution presented above cannot be observed quantitatively in other areas of Western Europe, but can be consistently confirmed if we look at several qualitative parameters such as the emergence of famines and the unequal structure of the food market, the rise of charitable institutions, the exploitation of cheap day labour in the textile industry, the pervasiveness of the seigneurial lordship, the increasing fragmentation of peasant holdings, the process of land consolidation by urban landowners and the development of more extractive agrarian contracts, or the spread of pluriactivity in urban and rural areas.⁹⁶ These dynamics are both the source and the consequence of more deeply unequal economic and social structures throughout late medieval society, as Laurent Feller's essay on poverty points out, which in turn made the poorest classes' access to the three pillars of economic independence – land, housing and work – more uncertain and unstable, exposing them to the vagaries of the agrarian and economic cycle and increasing the divide with the upper strata.⁹⁷

In the city, the unskilled day labourers of the textile industry made up the majority of the working population around 1300, constantly threatened by unemployment, socially and politically marginalized, and often tied to the employer: indeed, the latter could also be their main creditor, or the landlord, or the alderman in charge of urban labour regulations, or the judge in gild disputes, as reported in Douai at the end of the thirteenth century.⁹⁸ This group, or 'working poor', were indeed vulnerable, especially to the rise in food prices – particularly between 1300 and 1347 – which could aggravate their situation to the point of starvation. To this group should be added those who were living on the edge of poverty and who could suddenly become so – the so-called *poveri vergognosi* (shameful poor) – due to unemployment, health or family

⁹⁵ See Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," 17-8 and Appendix: in the county of Wertheim, of the thirty-three villages recorded, one has a Gini below 0,300, five between 0,300 and 0,400, fifteen between 0,400 and 0,500, eleven between 0,500 and 0,600 and only one above 0,600.

⁹⁶ See the chapters of Palermo, Almenar Fernández, Feller, Speecke and Lambrecht, Wilkin, Montanari and, for textile industry: Franceschi, "Mobilità;" Franceschi, "Salariato."

⁹⁷ See the chapter of Feller.

⁹⁸ See the chapter of Feller and Franceschi, "Mobilità;" Franceschi, "Salariato."

accidents, or to movements of downward social mobility.⁹⁹ At the bottom of all these groups, whether in urban or rural society, are women, who were more vulnerable to downward mobility and poverty because of unequal access to dowry and property and highly gendered social constraints.¹⁰⁰ In this context, as Luciano Palermo and Roberta Mucciarelli have pointed out in this volume, famine was a powerful detector and amplifier of socio-economic inequalities, threatening the social and political order of the city on the one hand and market demand, and hence production and employment, on the other.¹⁰¹ As a result, policies were adopted almost everywhere to maintain some kind of balance between resources and needs, especially in terms of food supply, but their development and results varied considerably, as Alexis Wilkin has shown for the Southern Low Countries, in terms of geographical and social opportunities.¹⁰² In this case, for example, the policies were “not uniformly favourable to consumers” in terms of the quality, timing, price and space to sell the staple foods and “confirmed the dominant position of the clergy [and of the city] in the food market”, always at the expense of the surrounding area.¹⁰³ In Siena some of the magnates were co-opted to collaborate with the popular regime to deal with famines while in Florence the policies adopted did not even alter the functioning of the food market, protecting the food entitlements of the workers, but also the private interests of the wheat merchants and those of the employers, who were not forced to increase wages.¹⁰⁴ In this respect, poverty and, consequently, inequality, appear to be “organically linked to the development of cities and the diversification of activities carried out there, especially manufacturing, where the use of abundant labour is a necessity and its cheapness an advantage”.¹⁰⁵ This situation was aggravated by immigration from the countryside, which in turn kept the mass of unskilled workers and thus wages stable, often leading to the further impoverishment of the lower classes of rural immigrants.¹⁰⁶

During the first half of the fourteenth century, the situation in the European countryside was not so different from that in the city, if not harsher. In 1350, inequality in the Valencian countryside seems to be correlated to the

⁹⁹ They should also be added those who, because of age or health problems, abandonment or lack of family ties, were also poor and destined to remain so: Feller, “Introduction.”

¹⁰⁰ See the chapter of Feller and Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà*.

¹⁰¹ See the chapters of Palermo and Mucciarelli. The Florentine case-study (Pinto, *Il libro del Biadaio*) is still particularly relevant for a comparison of the various socio-economic effects of medieval famines, their causes, their perception and the policies adopted to counteract them, along with a number of recent studies: Bourin, Drendel, Menant, *Les disettes*; Benito, *Crisis alimentarias*; Benito, Riera, *Guerra y carestía*; Palermo, Fara, Benito, *Políticas contra el hambre*; Alfani, Ó Gráda, *Famine in European history*.

¹⁰² See also Pinto, “Food Security.”

¹⁰³ See the chapter of Wilkin.

¹⁰⁴ See the chapters of Mucciarelli and Feller.

¹⁰⁵ See the chapter, of Feller, translation from Italian by the author.

¹⁰⁶ See the chapters of Feller, Wilkin and Nanni.

high fragmentation of peasant holdings, whose average size was 0,9 ha.¹⁰⁷ This phenomenon, apart from the differences in population pressure and agricultural system, is well known for Île-de-France (< 5 ha.), Norfolk (about 1,2 ha.) and Sienese Tuscany (about 0,9 ha.) around 1300.¹⁰⁸ This is also confirmed for coastal Flanders in the chapter by Mathijs Speecke and Thijs Lambrecht, who describe “a bottom-heavy rural society characterized by the dominance of small landholdings and a high degree of land fragmentation”, as shown by a modal landholding of 1,32 ha.¹⁰⁹ Land fragmentation was the result of both demographic growth and a dynamic land market in the thirteenth century, making rural society structurally vulnerable to adverse conjunctures, and thus a trigger for both inadequate food production and high inequality. Similar patterns can be seen throughout rural Europe, but the impact of the Great Famine of 1315-7 in West Flanders is particularly revealing. The adverse weather conditions led to a sharp fall in yields and in an immediate rise in cereals prices, further exacerbated by the isolation and destruction fostered by the Franco-Flemish war. As a result, “whereas net consumers faced dire times in 1315 and 1316, net producers of grain stood to gain from food scarcity and high prices”, especially lay and ecclesiastical urban landowners, who were then able to buy additional land.¹¹⁰ On the other side, the chronic lack of capital often forced peasants to liquidate their capital (land, livestock, working animals) in order to survive, and thus to be “condemned to live on charity, to be dependent on wages, or to accept harsh contractual conditions for a plot of land”. A similar pattern was widespread in Europe, as seen, for example, in the countryside of L'Aquila during the famine of 1330.¹¹¹

As the previous example suggests, the interplay between the socio-economic structure of late medieval society and exogenous factors such as climatic change, war and epidemics is relevant to explaining the dynamics of inequality during the conjuncture of the early fourteenth century and beyond.¹¹² The redistributive effect of the immediate population loss caused by the Great Plague of 1347-52 is well known: in this respect, the recent combination of isotopic, anthropometric and palaeostological analyses of corpses from fourteenth-century cemeteries in France and England suggests a general improvement (albeit differentiated by gender, social class and urban/rural context) in diet and consumption after the Black Death and especially in the fifteenth century.¹¹³ For example, an increase in animal protein (in Grenoble), dietary diversity (sorghum, sugar cane, fish, animals, in Toulouse, especially among women) or animal protein (in Cambridge, especially among men). In London,

¹⁰⁷ See the chapter of Almenar Fernández.

¹⁰⁸ See Fourquin, *Les campagnes*, 94-5; Campbell, *The Great*, 184-5; Cherubini, “Proprietari,” 285.

¹⁰⁹ See the chapter of Speecke and Lambrecht.

¹¹⁰ See the chapter of Speecke and Lambrecht.

¹¹¹ See the chapter of Feller and the footnote 101 above.

¹¹² Campbell, *The Great*.

¹¹³ See the chapter of Orecchioni.

the analyses available so far show an increase in life expectancy, a reduction in the risk of death and an improvement in health in the generations following the plague epidemics of 1348. At the same time, they suggest that the mortality rate from the plague may have been increased by nutritional deficiencies in the period before the epidemics due to worsening social inequalities, in line with the evidence presented above and available in the literature.¹¹⁴

However, the demographic decline accelerated by the Black Death and the epidemics that followed in the fourteenth century, while reducing economic inequality, may have indirectly provided the fertile ground for its recovery in the long term.¹¹⁵ Indeed, as Montanari's chapter on the Romagna countryside suggests in this volume, the economic and social upheaval was "an opportunity that the landowners did not miss". The need, in many cases, for a new start in agriculture and the unusual mobility of the rural labour force allowed landowners to make changes in land use, to renew customs, to introduce new methods of land management and the control of rural labour. This was achieved through land consolidation and the introduction of sharecropping with extractive clauses, a type of contract that was uncommon in thirteenth-century Romagna.¹¹⁶ A similar pattern is well described in Florentine and Sieneese Tuscany – where sharecropping, urban-driven land consolidation and city-political expansion were already disrupting rural society before 1348 – and in some French regions such as Haute-Marne. In others such as Vexin, some lords, trying to restore their wealth and income to pre-plague levels, imposed conditions similar to those of the pre-crisis period, keeping the small farmers in a state of permanent poverty.¹¹⁷

War had also an increasingly structural impact from 1300 onwards, and even more so after 1347, "when destruction from mere accident became systematic, destroying the capital, productive infrastructure and movable wealth of entire countries", reducing inequality from the one hand, and disrupting economic activity and the food market on the other.¹¹⁸ A regressive effect on inequality could also have occurred in the financing of wars, when governments created and then increased taxes, "imposing a tax burden that was often difficult to bear, as in Provence at the beginning of the fourteenth century".¹¹⁹ However, warfare may also have a potentially redistributive effect, as taxes and plunder went to mercenary armies – in full spread during the fourteenth century – and from them to other sectors of the urban and rural

¹¹⁴ See the chapter of Speecke and Lambrecht and the footnote 101 above.

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of some theoretical models: Alfani, "Epidemics," 11-6.

¹¹⁶ See the chapter of Montanari, translation from Italian by the author.

¹¹⁷ See the chapters of Feller and Mucciarelli together with Ginatempo, "Processi;" Cristoferi, "The Ties."

¹¹⁸ See the chapter of Feller, translation from Italian by the author, and Bertoni, "Costi;" Grillo "«Pace»." In general: Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;" van Bavel, "Looking;" Scheidel, *The Great*.

¹¹⁹ See the chapter of Feller, translation from Italian by the author and Mainoni, "Finanza;" Alfani, Di Tullio, *The Lion's share*.

population, such as merchants, blacksmiths and artisans, food producers and sellers, horse breeders, carriers and prostitutes...¹²⁰

Finally, inequality in the fourteenth-century conjuncture seems to have been widened not only by downward social mobility, but also by the parallel social advancement of middle groups, households or individuals, due to the complex interplay between processes of enrichment, political turnover and economic and demographic downturns. The results of such interactions, as revealed by cross-referencing fiscal wealth and political representation, are clearly visible in the case-studies of Florence and Bruges discussed in this volume. Alma Poloni, by studying the presence of local entrepreneurs, merchants, shopkeepers and artisans in the lists of government members in fourteenth-century Florence, suggests that this society was probably more polarized in the first half of the century than in the second, when the trend of social mobility seems to overlap with that of (declining) post-Black Death inequality. However, extreme polarization in the early fourteenth century did not mean social blockage: indeed, “supra-local trade and finance were still active channels of social mobility, but the very fact that they allowed rapid accumulation of wealth for the fortunate few who succeeded tended to accentuate rather than mitigate polarization and economic inequality”.¹²¹ Conversely, Sam Geens’s study of the overlap between the top 1% of taxpayers and office-holders in fourteenth-century Bruges shows, on the one hand, a composition of the richest taxpayers in constant flux and, on the other, fiscal inequality in check as a result of the political turmoil and of the crisis of the textile industry triggered by the first Franco-Flemish war (1297-1306) and then by the Great Plague. In this respect, the middle classes, such as artisans, seized new opportunities in the market and in government as a result of the decline in economic and political inequality, but this was probably to the detriment of the lower classes.¹²²

6. Perceptions, representations and responses

So far, we have recalled how the distribution of wealth, wages, status and opportunities appears to be highly unequal across European regions around 1300, and how this polarization had multiple and harsh consequences at times of famine, war, environmental crisis and at the height of economic transformations such as in the first half of the fourteenth century. We must therefore ask how this strong social and economic differentiation – which also seems to be well rooted in the economic and demographic growth of the thirteenth century – was constructed, perceived, represented, lived and dealt with by

¹²⁰ Bertoni, “Costi;” Grillo “«Pace».”

¹²¹ See the chapter of Poloni, translation from Italian by the author.

¹²² See the chapter of Geens.

those who experienced it, the men and women of the Middle Ages. Especially by those who suffered most from it – usually voiceless, as women and poor –, or who could benefit from it, or who had to cope with it to avoid major social crises – generally more represented in our sources. In short, we need to get closer to the subjects who described, elaborated and interacted with these social and economic differentiations to better understand their depth and impact.¹²³ Indeed, as Paolo Nanni has suggested, we may wonder whether the desperate words of the blind and lame in the Triumph of Death in the Florentine Basilica of Santa Croce in 1345 – “Since prosperity has left us, O Death, medicine for every pain, come and give us the last supper” – painted after two famines, a flood and an epidemic, are those of the poor or of the people who frequented that church.¹²⁴

In this respect, it should also be borne in mind that the consequences of an unequal distribution of wealth and income on key aspects such as food or clothing may appear even harsher than they were in reality if observed only within the framework designed by the study of official fiscal wealth or the formal food market. Alternative means of subsistence from the second-hand, informal and even illegal market, various forms of formal and informal charity, or additional untaxed or usually unrecorded sources of income or capital such as animals, tools or chattels, together with the skills and creativity of medieval peasants, the recognition of the participation of the poor in the social body and the emergence of a subculture of adaptation of the poor have been shown by recent studies, and even by some of the chapters in this volume, to have been extensively at work in medieval European society, with varying results, but not to be underestimated.¹²⁵ As Briggs and Nanni suggest in this volume, although it is often difficult to incorporate these aspects into quantitative research, a degree of caution or nuance may be advisable, making it worthwhile to focus also on less measurable aspects of inequality, as follows.

The spectrum of analysis chosen in the last section of this volume – perceptions, representations and responses – implies a number of possible approaches to socio-economic inequalities, as the five chapters, which mainly uses Central-Northern Italian cities as a laboratory, show. One approach considers the representations – that is, the mediated description of one or more specific languages of objects and aspects of reality – and the reflections – intended as conceptual elaborations by theologians, policy-makers, and economic actors – on inequalities.¹²⁶ By framing unequal socio-economic hierarchies, both elements contributed to their rationalization, but also

¹²³ Piccinni, “Signori,” 1205-6; Piccinni, “La ricerca.”

¹²⁴ See the chapter of Nanni, translation from Italian by the author.

¹²⁵ See the chapters of Briggs, Feller, Wilkin, Nanni together with Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté* and the as yet unpublished session organized by Antoni Furió at the Rural History Conference 2019 in Paris: “Innovative peasants. Land property, investment, work and agrarian change in late Middle Ages”.

¹²⁶ See *Oxford Reference*, s.v. “representation,” accessed August 9, 2024: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20111014165925770>.

to their justification, as Giacomo Todeschini's essay on the representation of second-hand dealers and retailers in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Western Europe demonstrates. By looking at labour regulations and scholastic treatises, the author observes, in the context of the medieval economic expansion, "a precise tendency to transform the economic habits and inequalities that qualified the protagonists [great merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs] into politically significant normative dynamics" against the lower economic strata (craftsmen, second-hand dealers, retailers). What was at stake was the right to set the price of goods and, consequently, access to and control of the market, intended by medieval Christian society as the space to realize the common good.¹²⁷

In the name of the common good, processes of exclusion and inclusion based on perceptions and representations of wealth and social status also divided the political and social body of the city during the so-called regimes of the *Popolo*. This was the middle and upper class of merchants, entrepreneurs, artisans, judges and notaries who ruled the urban communities of Central-Northern Italy, mostly between 1250 and 1347. In this context, socio-economic inequalities were framed through political discourse and its concrete application in the form of laws and exclusion lists against the magnates – that is, the land-based military urban elites – as analyzed by Roberta Mucciarelli. In her chapter, the author shows how the complex interplay between political power, social behaviour, profession and source of wealth, and fame, i.e. the public perception of all these elements, was crucial in organizing society, re-integrating or excluding magnates' households and groups, and negotiating the space of their political participation as well as their economic expansion in the countryside.

The different levels of wealth and political and economic 'citizenship' of each social group were also expressed primarily through clothing which, together with home property and other luxury items, was a relevant social marker in medieval society.¹²⁸ Clothes, along with jewellery, armour, palaces, furniture, horses and equipment, were at once a source of social distinction, a means of hoarding wealth, and a sign of ownership of the means of production such as land and money. As such, they represented and justified inequality – since they were signs of wealth and power to be (partially) redistributed as alms or protection to the poor –, but they were also targeted by the Church and the sumptuary laws because they represented a form of immobilization of capital that would be better used if it were invested in productive expenditure.¹²⁹ In this respect, the sumptuary legislation of the cities of Central-Northern Italy, discussed by Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani in this volume, were in the hands of urban elites "a political tool, an effective means

¹²⁷ See the chapter of Todeschini.

¹²⁸ Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale; Una nuova cultura*; Piccinni, *All'apogeo*.

¹²⁹ Boisseuil, Feller, "Fortunes," 7-8.

of reinforcing hierarchies, of making them recognizable, of communicating them through clothing and ornaments". Inherited from a deep-rooted Roman tradition, they began at the end of the thirteenth century as a disciplining of expenditure, mostly related to women's clothing and accessories, regardless of social class. Then, during the fourteenth century and beyond, sumptuary laws tended to represent and reinforce the already existing socio-economic differentiations and mechanisms of exclusion and hierarchization between nobles and artisans, upper and lower classes, old and new elites, urban and rural, men and women.¹³⁰ A similar mechanism of socio-economic differentiation – shaped through culture and fashion rather than legislation – also seems to have been at work in private art production and consumption, with the transition from the post-Black Death collective and individual patronage of the newly enriched middle and lower strata of Italian urban society to that exclusively associated with the urban elites of the Renaissance.¹³¹ All these processes, moreover, seem to converge with the reinterpretation of great private wealth and its owners, usually bankers, merchants and entrepreneurs, as a fundamental pillar of Italian cities, as a source of public financial security, economic dynamism and urban ornamentation, carried out by Renaissance intellectuals (and even partly by Franciscan theologians), especially in fifteenth-century Florence.¹³²

Before, however, the profound differentiations observed around 1300 in Western Europe in general, and in Italian urban society in particular, and their roots in the preceding economic and demographic expansion and its subsequent transformation, appear to have been as much exacerbated as they were understood and tentatively and variously addressed by contemporaries, especially by those who held religious and political power.¹³³ In the second half of the thirteenth century, for example, lay preachers and gild notary members such as Albertanus from Brescia and Bono Giamboni from Florence were already discussing the relationship between justice (as the redistribution of surplus through alms) and increasing poverty in Italian cities, while Thomas Aquinas was condemning the accumulation of wealth as sinful.¹³⁴ In the early-fourteenth century Siena an anonymous chronicler claimed that wealth is not conducive to high thoughts and virtuous conduct, for the rich man "always seeks to find something to the injury of the poor and to his own advantage".¹³⁵ A similar point was made in the second half of the fourteenth century by the French intellectual Nicolas Oresme, who argued that "in cities governed 'democratically', the super-rich [superabundantes] should be ex-

¹³⁰ See the chapter of Nico Ottaviani, translation from Italian by the author.

¹³¹ Cohn, *Paradoxes* and the project "Art and Inequality in the Post-Black Death Century": <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=EP/X023516/1#/tabOverview>.

¹³² Alfani, *As Gods among Men*, 218-25; Todeschini, *Les Marchands*.

¹³³ Feller, "Introduction."

¹³⁴ Gazzini, "Albertano;" Alfani, *As Gods among Men*, 214-5. For the sin of avarice in Thomas Aquinas, see: Palmeri: "Sulla Q. 13."

¹³⁵ See the chapter of Mucciarelli, translation from Italian by the author.

pelled, since otherwise they would enjoy overbearing political power, being among the people ‘as God is among men’”.¹³⁶

In this respect, discussing and addressing poverty and inequality was not a neutral argument – although it is not neutral even today – but was part of the political argumentation and propaganda of the Italian urban elites and, in particular, of the regimes of the *Popolo*, thus showing that the lower social strata – intended in the classification mentioned above, i.e. the ‘shameful poor’, the ‘working poor’, the elderly or the abandoned – were considered part of the social body and integrated into the urbanization process, as Paolo Nanni and Gabriella Piccinni argue in this volume. Indeed, addressing socio-economic inequality, for example through alms and food distribution in times of famine, was also a mechanism to “further reinforce submission to an unequal, but not necessarily perceived as unjust, social order”, as Feller suggests.¹³⁷ This point is clearly illustrated by the famous frescoes of the Buongoverno in Siena of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, where strong social differences are included but reconciled by the painter in a system “where productivity can coexist with civil charity”: there are not social conflicts, only institutional or political ones.¹³⁸ In general, as some studies have noted, concepts such as “the common good, peace, law, rights, freedom, unity and harmony” remained central to both political discourse and the motivations for revolt throughout late medieval Europe, while those relating to the inequality between rich and poor, although recognized as a reality, were less widespread until the early modern period and especially the eighteenth century.¹³⁹ In fact, as suggested by the theologians, chroniclers and intellectuals mentioned above, economic inequality was perceived in the late Middle Ages more as an issue for its negative socio-political and spiritual consequences (thus condemning the greedy and motivating redistribution through alms or proposing to hinder the political power of the extremely rich in a medieval commune) than as a problem *per se* (with also potential implications for economic growth, social justice or human rights) as it is considered in the contemporary debate.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, “the beauty of the Italian cities of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries would not have been built without a kind of great consensus”, as Gabriella Piccinni points out in her chapter. In a physical context constantly marked by signs of inequality – such as walls, building materials, home ownership, regulations to access spaces – public buildings and infrastructures such city halls, churches, roads, hospitals, bridges, fountains

¹³⁶ Alfani, *As Gods among Men*, 11-2, 215-8.

¹³⁷ See the chapter of Feller.

¹³⁸ Piccinni, *Operazione*, 260, translation from Italian by the author.

¹³⁹ See: Alfani, Frigeni, “Inequality (un)perceived,” in particular 52-6; Dumolyn, Haemers, “A bad chicken,” Cohn, *Lust for liberty*, 239.

¹⁴⁰ See: Piketty, *Capital*; Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*; Milanovic, *Global Inequality*; Milanovic, *Visions of Inequality*; Alfani, *As Gods among Men*; Kamalvanshi, Kushwaha, “Economic Inequality,” Alfonso, LaFleur, Alarcó, “Concepts of Inequality,” Banerjee, Duflo, *Poor economics*; Tilly, *Durable Inequality*; Sen, *Resources*; Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*.

and markets were first of all an important source of work for low-skilled workers: both urban dwellers and political elites were well aware of their counter-cyclical function. Moreover, all these elements and especially hospitals played a role in developing a sense of civic belonging within urban society and in the way the poor could perceive urban life, through the wide range of services they offered, but also through the beauty of the spaces, paintings and furniture. In this respect, the beauty of the city was a message container to build up a political consensus beyond the social strata directly involved in the *res publica*. As a result, the *Popolo* and subsequent regimes invested heavily in the construction and maintenance of these spaces, which could also become the scene of social unrest when famine or unemployment made this unequal society unbearable for part of the population.¹⁴¹

Finally, the way in which medieval society responded to poverty and inequality during the conjuncture of the fourteenth century should also be reconsidered in the light of recent research on the development of the hospitals and welfare institutions in late medieval Italy, not only in terms of quantity but above all in terms of the quality of the responses enacted, as Paolo Nanni argues in his chapter using late medieval Tuscany as a privileged observatory.¹⁴² From the end of the thirteenth century, the growing number of poor and the social needs observed during the medieval growth were addressed by the city governments and urban elites by taking control of the centuries-old religiously founded hospitals that already existed. While it is true that these institutions did not eradicate the causes of inequalities and their consequences, and that “the reintegration of workers into the market supply was the most that the medieval ruling classes could do in terms of equality”, they did contribute, “at least in part, to maintaining a minimum of urban social balance”, while up to half of the urban population could be involved as active or passive actors in their activity.¹⁴³ All the more, these institutions witnessed a series of improvements and innovations in the quality and awareness of social interventions, leading scholars to define them as part of a proper welfare system. In fact, the *raison d'être* of these institutions was declaredly the poor, some of their characteristics were comparable to those of (modern) public and social enterprises, and their purpose was a broader defense of the social body, with general and individual custom-designed interventions covering a wide range of social needs through the supply of labour, the operation of the food market and by establishing networks of social relations.¹⁴⁴ In this respect, the hospitals and welfare institutions (as well as the operation of some religious institutions) of the Italian cities of the late Middle Ages seem, at this stage of the research, to differ from those studied, for example, in the Low Countries, in terms of the scope and depth of the interventions, and perhaps also in terms

¹⁴¹ See the chapter of Piccinni, translation from Italian by the author.

¹⁴² Piccinni, *Alle origini*.

¹⁴³ See the chapter of Feller and Nanni, translations from Italian by the author.

¹⁴⁴ See the chapter of Nanni.

of awareness. This could also be the result of a different historiographical interpretation: in any case, a broader comparison remains to be made, especially between Northern and Mediterranean Europe.¹⁴⁵

7. The evolution of socio-economic inequalities in the late Middle Ages: an outline

On the basis of the above findings and caveats, we can finally offer some insights into the structure and evolution of socio-economic inequalities in the conjuncture of the early fourteenth century and, tentatively, beyond.

First, it seems clear that an increase in economic inequality – varying in depth at the regional and even micro level, but probably monotonic in its general tendency – can be suggested since the second half of the thirteenth century, and probably even earlier. In this phase, social mobility and growing number of poor were also part of the pattern.

Second, that this trend probably peaked between 1290 and 1330 and was more extreme in the urban centres than in the countryside, in the suburbs than in rural villages. In this respect, high inequality is observable at two levels: within the city and between the urban and rural areas.

Third, that during the first half of the fourteenth century – in parallel with a slight increase of the statistical observations available but also with a more complex economic phase – cities, rural areas and regions could witness also diverging path of slight decline, stability or even further rise of economic inequality. In this context social mobility seems also lowering while urban welfare institutions and food regulations, as indirect proxy of unequal social relations, spread. Moreover, as shown for Florence, Bruges and Siena, the middle class seems to have been the protagonist of this phase, with differences in the socio-economic sectors involved, the scale, the duration and the causes in each case-study.

Fourth, that this pattern of wealth concentration was not always hindered or at least stopped for the following decades by the Great Plague of 1347-52. If such a decline is clearly visible, for example, in post-Black Death Tuscany – where it was also reflected in greater social mobility in Florence – Southern France (Albi and Toulouse), Piedmont (Chieri and Cherasco) and Germany (the district of Wertheim in Baden-Württemberg), it is not evident in the areas of Mediterranean Iberia studied in this volume, where we can only observe an increase in inequality, albeit a slight one. There, moreover, women seem to have benefited from accumulating more wealth than at the beginning of the fourteenth century (while in other contexts such as Toulouse, they have reduced gender inequalities in protein consumption and dietary diversity).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. for example the chapters of Nanni and Wilkin together with Piccinni, *Alle origini*; van Bavel, Rijpma “How important;” Haemers, Ryckbosch, “A targeted public.”

Furthermore, the data available for German cities after the Black Death in this region (1348) still show high levels of inequality: unfortunately, there is only one case (Quedlinburg) where data are available before and after the Black Death, while for the others the declining trend is clearly visible from the second half of the fourteenth century and, especially, in the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁶ The Iberian cities, with a more incomplete series of data, show a similar trend to the German case-study for the late Middle Ages, with the economic recession and reduction in inequality only occurring at the end of the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁷

In this respect, further research and new evidence should be pursued to clarify the different demographic, gendered and redistributive impacts of the epidemics that occurred between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (and not only the Black Death), and their interplay with other factors.¹⁴⁸ In addition, this research will also benefit from cross-referencing evidence on economic inequality with the growing body of bioarchaeological data on living standards and levels of consumption before and after the Black Death, as suggested by Paola Orecchioni in this volume. At the current state of research, the general reduction in inequality seems to coincide with an improvement in diet and consumption in Grenoble and Toulouse and in living standards and life expectancy in London.

The essays in this volume, as well as earlier scholarship, reject a mono-causal explanation for all these trends, especially as they relate to the first phase of the fourteenth-century conjuncture. On the contrary, they all point in different ways to the complex interplay between the economic and demographic phase and the wide range of formal and informal institutions at work in late medieval society and mentality. In this respect, Kuznets's inverted U-shape of distribution – that is, inequality is initially growing and then reducing after an economy has reached its peak – may be confirmed only in its first part, and not only as a result of economic growth.¹⁴⁹

Between c. 1250 and 1300, rising inequality seems to have been the result of economic expansion – with increasing exchange, growing production, greater social mobility – together with demographic growth and urbanization – with the fragmentation of peasant landholdings and the urban migration of low-skilled workers – and pre-existing or new unequal property structures and relations – such as seigneurial or those resulting from the injection of urban capital into the countryside. All these factors have also intersected with the constant attempts by religious, market and political elites to under-

¹⁴⁶ Gierok, Schaff, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," 17; Alfani, "Epidemics," 9.

¹⁴⁷ See the chapter of Furió; Furió *et al.*, "Measuring economic inequality," 180-2; Carvajal *et al.*, *La desigualdad económica*.

¹⁴⁸ Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," 1090-1; Alfani, "Epidemics." See the research projects and seminars developed within the recently founded network of the École française de Rome "La mémoire des crises dans les sociétés méditerranéennes. Antiquité-début de l'époque moderne": <https://www.efrome.it/reseaux-thematiques-de-recherche>.

¹⁴⁹ See also: Milanovic, *Global Inequality*, 61-2.

stand, reshape and exploit or counter the emergence of new dynamics of social mobility and economic change, resulting in a new structuring of unequal socio-economic relations. In this respect, it seems that while growth has created new opportunities, it has also, in combination with the above factors, pushed many groups to the margins of society.¹⁵⁰ In addition, it should be emphasized that socio-economic inequality in late medieval European society – although it was also recognized in what was considered to be its potentially negative spiritual and socio-political consequence – seems to have been generally accepted (with a few exceptions when it was excessively exacerbated, as in the case of famines or economic crises), partially addressed and widely reproduced.

Cities appear to be the main stage for these dynamics, as the qualitative and quantitative evidence in this volume and elsewhere shows. Their study refutes the Paretian assumption that economic growth is followed by an upward levelling of incomes: as the case of Florence, this is only verifiable above a certain threshold of per capita income, below which growth increases economic inequality and thus social contrast in the community.¹⁵¹ Moreover, from the end of the thirteenth century, the high level of inequality reached by late medieval society is confronted with cycles of crises (agrarian, financial, military and demographic) and a series of economic transformations which, in combination with previous socio-economic structures, seem to have produced more regionally differentiated and urban-rural fluctuating patterns of distribution of wealth, income and opportunities. Although these patterns appear to be less linear, it can be argued that inequality does not appear to be always consistently decreasing. Its interplay with famines, wars and the new opportunities offered by financial and industrial crises to landowners, market elites and some social sectors seems to have widened the gap between rich and poor and reproduced unequal socio-economic conditions. The development of welfare systems and food regulations did not reverse this trend but did probably help to mitigate some of its harshest effects by balancing such growing polarization and confirming it at the same time.

Finally, the demographic loss and economic transformation following the Black Death reversed the situation, reducing inequality, increasing wages and social mobility, and improving diet and consumption at various levels. This trend is clearly widespread, but the evidence in this volume suggests that it has probably not been for everyone, not for all regions and sectors, and in some cases not for long. The Iberian Peninsula, for example, “experienced an increase in inequality, primarily due to rising prices that did not decline as quickly as in other European regions. As a result, the inflation that followed the mortality crisis rapidly offset the increase in nominal wages”, while specific inheritance systems, such as in Catalonia, may also have contribut-

¹⁵⁰ Fara, “Emarginazione,” 23.

¹⁵¹ Fara; Malanima, “Crescita.”

ed by favouring the transfer of family wealth to one heir.¹⁵² The dietary improvements observed so far in few excavations in France and England were still marked by gender and social differentiation, with clergy, urban dwellers and men appearing to benefit more than peasants and women. As for women, their conditions seem to have partly improved after the Black Death, with female taxpayers accumulating more wealth than men in Tortosa, access to protein increasing in Toulouse, and wages for less-skilled female workers rising in fifteenth-century Antwerp, but a general overview of different proxies (and an extensive dataset) to measure and compare this trend across Europe is still lacking.¹⁵³ Moreover, it seems that the Black Death with its various effects on demography and redistribution may have also contributed to the full spread and establishment of the idea and realization of a complex and varied welfare system, as suggested in some cases for late medieval Italy and the North-Western Mediterranean. In any case, this process had begun earlier, at the height of the medieval economic development, and continued later, until the sixteenth century.¹⁵⁴ In general, however, the new economic and social spaces and opportunities created by the Great Plague and subsequent epidemics were also open to those (old and new) elites and social sectors that had the political power and economic capital to shape society through laws, fiscal and inheritance systems, the market and even fashion, as this volume shows for Central-Northern Italy. Even the perception of the role and public relevance of the highest socio-economic strata changed, with large private fortunes, once seen mainly as the fruit of *avaritia*, were now seen as a necessary contribution to the public good. When all these factors intersected with demographic growth in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, inequality began to increase monotonically again, rather than decreasing or fluctuating.

¹⁵² See the chapter of Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget, footnote 60.

¹⁵³ For wages, see: De Pleijt, van Zanden, "Gender wage inequality." See in general: Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà*.

¹⁵⁴ Luongo, "Gli ospedali;" and, in general, Piccinni, *Alle origini*.

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I

Sources, proxies and methods

Material inequalities in England, c. 1290 - c. 1340

by Chris Briggs

L'Inghilterra del Trecento era una società fortemente diseguale: tuttavia, valutarne con precisione la distribuzione della ricchezza, del reddito e i livelli di povertà non è affatto semplice. Le famiglie si guadagnavano da vivere combinando diverse fonti di reddito spesso difficili da identificare, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la massa dei piccoli proprietari terrieri e dei senza terra. Il saggio esamina i recenti tentativi di stimare la disuguaglianza in questo periodo. Si sostiene che tali studi forniscano un'utile guida generale alla distribuzione della ricchezza e del reddito, ma che a livello micro possa essere fuorviante concentrarsi sulla terra o sui beni mobili in modo isolato. Il saggio fornisce alcune evidenze originali, tratte dall'archivio reale e dagli archivi dei *manors*, riguardanti le condizioni materiali di individui e famiglie. Questi frammenti di informazioni permettono di sfumare parte del pessimismo sulla percentuale di famiglie al di sotto della soglia di povertà alla fine del XIII secolo.

England c. 1300 was clearly an unequal society, yet assessing its distribution of wealth and income and levels of poverty with precision is not straightforward. Households earned their living by combining different sources of income that are hard to identify, especially for the mass of smallholders and landless. This article reviews recent attempts to estimate inequality in this period. It argues that such exercises provide a helpful general guide to the distribution of wealth and income, but at the micro-level it can be misleading to focus on either land or movable goods in isolation. The article provides some new evidence drawn from the royal archive and manorial sources concerning the material circumstances of individuals and households. These fragments help to qualify some of the pessimism concerning the share of households living at or below the 'poverty line' at the end of the thirteenth century.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Inghilterra, famiglie, diseguaglianze materiali.

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1. *Introduction*

That England around the year 1300 was a deeply unequal society in terms of its wealth, income and material well-being perhaps hardly needs stating. Recent publications by historians interested in the relationship between economic growth and inequality have advanced our quantitative understanding of wealth and income differences among households in this period, as well as their variation over space. This work has also given us a better sense of where pre-plague England fits in when overall inequality is viewed in a long-term perspective. These studies have only served to underline more starkly what one would expect based on previous scholarship: that England's social structure before the plague was markedly polarized, and, crucially, extremely 'bottom-heavy'. It was dominated by a mass of rural smallholders, cottagers, labourers and paupers, a significant proportion of whom were living on or below the 'poverty line'. Collectively, it is argued, this population of struggling households had grown over the preceding two centuries, only to be dramatically reduced following the Black Death of 1348-9. According to these recent studies, England c. 1300 may not have been quite as unequal as it was to become in the early modern period. Yet this was only because it was so poor; GDP at this date remained too low to provide much scope for the redistribution of wealth from the least to the most prosperous.¹

One might wonder whether there is much that any discussion of economic inequality in English society before the Black Death can usefully add to this current general picture of the distribution of resources. The latter certainly represents a compelling story about inequality that finds support in previous local studies. The purpose of this study is not to attempt to revise or offer alternatives to the global estimates presented in the works just cited. Instead, the objective is first to explore the evidential basis of the two main macro-estimates of inequality, one of which is based mainly on land as a source of income, and the other on taxable wealth. This exploration is an essential step towards showing that at the micro level, focusing exclusively or primarily on either landholding size or taxation contribution can provide a misleading impression of a household's position. The final step is to draw on a wider range of source material which yields fragments of direct evidence about income, production and consumption among the poorer rural households, a group that is generally quite sparsely documented. Partly because of the rather narrow period under consideration, and the challenges of dating archaeological sites and artefacts with sufficient precision, attention is confined to written evidence.²

¹ Campbell, *Great Transition*, 261-6; Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, chapter 8; Bekar, Reed, "Land Markets;" Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

² Dyer, "Crisis of the Early Fourteenth Century."

When combined, these fragments can provide a more rounded picture of the material livelihoods of households. This approach necessarily involves the exploration of individual case studies, rather than the production of broad estimates applying to the whole of society. Nonetheless, its implications are that prevailing views concerning the circumstances of some groups towards the bottom of the income and wealth and distributions may be too pessimistic.

2. Estimates of inequality c. 1300

This section focuses on two key recent contributions. The first is an attempt to reconstruct income inequality in the form of a social table for England c. 1290. The table is presented with related discussion as a chapter Appendix in Campbell's *The Great Transition* and, in virtually identical form, in *British Economic Growth* by Broadberry, Campbell and co-authors.³ This version of the social table represents a revision of one first published by Campbell in 2008.⁴ In *British Economic Growth*, the social table of c. 1290 is discussed in relation to equivalents from 1381, 1688 and later. The second key recent study, by Alfani and García Montero, uses taxation records to reconstruct wealth inequality, focusing on a comparison of the lay subsidies (royal taxes on movable lay wealth) of 1327-32 with the Tudor subsidies of 1524-5. The present section offers a consideration of the sources and methods underlying these two contributions, the aim being to establish some general points of relevance to the sections which follow.⁵

Campbell's social table approach divides groups of English households into eight separate categories and assigns an estimated annual income to each. These estimates are consistent with up-to-date figures on England's national income, population and total arable area. A key feature of the revised social table of c. 1290 is the inclusion of a 'poverty line', which represents the minimum income required for a family to afford Robert C. Allen's "respectability basket" of consumables. The social table places 41% of households below this 'poverty line'. A Gini coefficient based on the c. 1290 table allows comparison with later dates.⁶

The reconstructed social table of c. 1290 is a stimulating aid to analysis, but it raises questions. It is surprising, for instance, that some contrasting social groups are aggregated together. For instance, one category includes both "merchants" and "urban labourers". These are groups whose experiences and incomes must usually have diverged quite markedly. It is also worth noting that the underlying source, at least for the portion of the social table that concerns groups other than landlords, is another table entitled "An

³ See above the footnote 1.

⁴ Campbell, "Benchmarking," 940, table 17.

⁵ Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

⁶ Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, 329, Table 8.07.

outline of English society c. 1300", published by Mayhew in 1995. Mayhew's table was in turn based on case studies and modelling exercises contained in Dyer's *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (1989). In offering his estimates, Mayhew noted wryly that "Dyer's balanced historical judgements have been looted and pillaged in the most cavalier fashion to provide data for this table, which can only offer at best a massive over-simplification".⁷ It is worth bearing this remark in mind when considering subsequent exercises based on Mayhew's work.

The most important point for present purposes, however, is that the social table of c. 1290 is based firmly on access to land. For understandable reasons the quantity of land held is seen as crucial to incomes, and it is the proliferation of smallholders and landless groups which explains the 'bottom-heavy' character of the social structure. Campbell argues that in addition to the cottagers and other largely landless households lying below the 'poverty line' (41% of the total), a proportion of the 300,000 or so "smallholder" households possessing 3 to 6 hectares (7 to 14 acres) of land were also at risk of slipping below that line in difficult years. The existence of this vulnerable smallholder group "increased the proportion of rural households living on or below the poverty line to maybe two-thirds of the total", Campbell suggests.⁸ Other studies explicitly equate 'inequality' with 'land inequality'.⁹ The decades around 1300 are of course familiar as an era of proliferating smallholdings, and it is this feature above all that underpins the assumption that very large sections of the rural population must have struggled routinely to make ends meet at this time.

There are well-known grounds for moderating this assumption, however, all of them given impetus by recent research. The first is the question of subletting. Put simply, peasant holding sizes derived ultimately from manorial surveys and rentals do not consider any land taken on lease from other households. The second issue concerns the contribution of wages, including those earned by women and children, and of non-agrarian activities, to the household incomes of smallholders.¹⁰ These are of course extremely hard to estimate; no figures for the potential income contributions of a wife and children feature in the household income estimates underlying the c. 1290 social table, for instance. In any case opportunities for employment may have been diminishing in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries when they were most needed.¹¹ Third, a view of income distribution driven by landholding size assumes a primacy of arable agriculture that makes sense for some regions but not others. A focus on arable acreage can mislead because such small peasant holdings tended to have relatively large numbers of livestock

⁷ Mayhew, "Modelling Medieval Monetisation," 59; Dyer, *Standards*.

⁸ Campbell, *Great Transition*, 265-6; see also: Slavin, *Experiencing Famine*, 244-7.

⁹ Bekar, Reed, "Land markets."

¹⁰ Page, "Smallholders;" Dyer, *Peasants Making History*, 284-8.

¹¹ Langdon, "Minimum wages."

per sown acre, good access to manure, and consequent high crop yields.¹² Finally, a growing body of evidence points to the conclusion that, contrary to what is traditionally assumed, arable productivity on peasant smallholdings before the Black Death was higher than on the much better documented large manorial demesnes that underpin estimates of output.¹³

In the other key recent quantitative contribution to the discussion of inequality, Alfani and García Montero take a different approach, using fiscal records to reconstruct the wealth distribution.¹⁴ For the early fourteenth century their source materials are the lay subsidies. Historians are very familiar with these levies, in which the household's goods were assessed and valued by local men following a parliamentary grant of taxation, and a fraction of this assessment (e.g. a fifteenth or twentieth) was paid as a tax charge. Beginning in the early thirteenth century, this system prevailed until 1334, when assessments of individual households were replaced by tax quotas at the community or *vill* level. Alfani and García Montero concentrate on records produced in connection with the lay subsidies of 1327 and 1332, which were the last to be granted before the introduction of the quota system. Like other researchers before them, the authors focus on those levies mainly because surviving 'county rolls' listing taxpayers' names, tax charges and (sometimes) overall assessments are abundant for these years, allowing coverage of a substantial portion of the kingdom. Most subsidy grants, including these two, featured a formal wealth threshold below which households were exempt. This meant that many – probably most – households did not pay tax, and do not appear in the records. To reconstruct the missing portion of the distribution, Alfani and García Montero therefore employ a statistical technique based on the principle that the available data fits a lognormal distribution with left-censoring. The degree of inequality they detect in the reconstructed data (as measured by a Gini index) is of a similar order to that found for other pre-modern European societies. The authors' county-by-county analysis also found a correlation between average household wealth and inequality. A slight increase in inequality by the time of the next usable tax data – in 1524-5 – was detected.¹⁵

Alfani and García Montero are acutely aware of a large literature extending back over a century, much of it highly sceptical, which has debated the value of the later thirteenth – and early fourteenth-century lay subsidy records as evidence for the level of wealth and its social and geographical distribution. This literature has focused on such problems as the size and characteristics of the untaxed population, the range of movables on which the taxes were assessed, and the existence of manipulated and formulaic returns, especially in

¹² Slavin, "Peasant Livestock Husbandry;" La Poutré, "Fertilization by Manure;" Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 61; Drendel, "Les paysans."

¹³ Hatcher, "Peasant Productivity."

¹⁴ Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

¹⁵ Alfani, García Montero.

connection with the subsidies of 1327 and 1332.¹⁶ Alfani and García Montero fully acknowledge such concerns in their article, but ultimately they argue that they are not significant enough to undermine the estimation of inequality, and that taxed wealth can in general be taken as a good proxy for overall wealth. The authors' position is that even if the tax assessments were only approximate, and ignored some elements of movable property, handled appropriately they show the relative distribution of the whole.

At the aggregate level the lay subsidies may well provide a guide to the broad shape of early fourteenth-century wealth distribution, and indeed they represent the only available source realistically capable of doing so. Yet a couple of examples drawn from the published 'county rolls' for the 1327 subsidy demonstrate the difficulty of using the returns to obtain a nuanced sense of material inequalities within the vill. First, at Marchington (Staffordshire), 23 taxpayers paid charges totalling £ 4 (4 pounds) exactly (no assessment figures appear). Four paid 2 s. (2 shillings), two paid 2 s. 6 d. (2 shillings and 6 pence, or 30 d.), seven paid 3 s., four paid 4 s., and six paid 5 s. Aside from the artificial bunching of charges at just five levels, there are further odd features here. One is the suspicious round sum for the total tax charge. Another is the fact that there were no taxpayers charged below 2 s., which is surprising given that the lowest potential charge was just 6 d. (with the threshold of liability set at movables worth 10 s.).¹⁷ At Dronfield (Derbyshire), we see a different pattern. Here twenty-eight taxpayers were assessed at £ 30 exactly, giving an overall tax charge for the vill of 30 s. Twelve paid 6 d., six paid 12 d., five paid 18 d., four paid 2 s., and one, 2 s. 6 d.¹⁸ Again, we observe the implausibly rounded total charge, the absence of fractions of a penny, and the positioning of multiple taxpayers at a small number of convenient sums, though here, in contrast to Marchington, the minimum possible tax charge is the most common. It is certainly not the case that all villis in the Staffordshire and Derbyshire 1327 subsidies show such signs of artificiality in the assessment. Many do, however, and in these cases, there must be serious doubts surrounding the relationship between the figures in the returns and the actual distribution of wealth among taxpayers, and about the reliability of those figures for understanding the characteristics of those who do not appear on the tax lists at all.

Such evidence is sufficiently common to raise the suspicion that proper assessments of movables undertaken in accordance with the official instructions had been abandoned in many locations by 1327. A further insight into the assessment process can be gained from the rarer 'local' rolls which, unlike the 'county' rolls, list the taxpayers' assessed goods and their values, as opposed to just their total assessments. One notable point of contention in the literature on the lay subsidies concerns the movables taxed, and the degree

¹⁶ E.g. Hadwin, "Medieval Lay Subsidies;" Rigby, "Urban Society;" Briggs, "Taxation."

¹⁷ Wrottesley, "Exchequer Subsidy Roll," 223.

¹⁸ Cox, "Derbyshire in 1327-8," 86.

and character of exemptions. Scholars have disagreed on whether the local taxers followed official instructions or informal custom when deciding what and what not to tax. What is clear is that the tax lists cannot be treated as a faithful reflection of the contents of peasant houses and farm buildings. One feature noted by many commentators is that local lists from the countryside tend to be almost completely dominated by livestock, grain, and other basic agricultural items. Even where household utensils and other non-agricultural goods were theoretically liable to taxation, they rarely appear in the local tax rolls.¹⁹ Dividing possessions into essentials and non-essentials (or 'luxuries'), Britnell argued on the basis of such taxation evidence that peasant movables c. 1300 consisted mainly of livestock and agricultural produce, plus the utilitarian farming equipment and household articles necessary for their livelihoods.²⁰ The suggestion that even the taxpaying peasantry possessed little surplus income to spend on non-essentials of course fits well with the view that a significant share of English households sat on or below the 'poverty line' at this time. However, given the problematic nature of the lay subsidy materials, it seems questionable to assume that the rarity of household goods, including non-essentials, is convincing proof of their actual low incidence in households. We may posit that non-agricultural goods escaped the taxers because they were of low monetary value and low 'visibility', but this does not in itself mean that they played an insignificant role in the material lives of their owners. A further significant question is whether we can assume that the profile of movable goods among taxed households was basically the same among the untaxed.

3. Inconsistent hierarchies of landholding and movable wealth

One way of evaluating the utility of landholding size and the possession of movable possessions as markers of inequality is to ask whether the two measures tell similar stories for specific communities. To do this, one must compare sources which indicate the distribution of landholdings – such as manorial surveys, extents, or rentals – with lay subsidy documents. In this section, this is done by focusing on places for which we have both a survey-type source, and a lay subsidy return that lists taxpayers and their individual assessments and/or charges. The aim is to see whether the two sources offer a consistent picture; while a list of landholding tenants and a list of taxpayers are highly unlikely to be identical, it is instructive to ask how far we see the same households appearing in roughly the same distribution in the two sources. Ideally, the survey-type source and the lay subsidy return must be very close together in date, and the community must be one in which there existed just one man-

¹⁹ *Taxation of 1297*, XVII; Hadwin, "Evidence," 148.

²⁰ Britnell, "Movable goods."

or, or one dominant manor, which is represented by the survey-type source. This maximizes the comparability of the two sources. However, it is difficult to identify locations that satisfy these criteria. Just three rural communities – or villas – are considered here. Table 1 indicates for each the number of taxpayers, the number of recorded landholding tenants, and the overlap between the two groups.

Table 1. *Numbers of individual taxpayers and landholding tenants in three communities*

	A. number of individual taxpayers	B. Number of individual tenants	Individuals in both A and B
Landbeach (A. 1315 subsidy; B. 1316 extent)	47	30	15
Great Horwood (A. 1327 subsidy; B. 1320 extent)	42	46	21
Bockleton (A. 1327 subsidy; B. 1327 fealty list)	17	81	5

Sources: *Landbeach*: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Archives, CCCC 09/35/145; TNA, E 179/81/7, m. 5. *Great Horwood*: Oxford, New College Archives, 3912-15 and 4503; TNA, E 179/242/86. *Bockleton*: Stafford Record Office, D(W)1788/P39.B10; TNA, E 179/200/1, m. 8d.

For the first example – Landbeach, in Cambridgeshire – we pair a manorial extent dated 1316 with a lay subsidy list relating to the twentieth of 1315.²¹ There were two manors in this vill, of roughly equal size, and the thirty tenants listed on the extent relate to just one of the two manors (Brays). The actual number of tenant households in 1316 was around 60. Clearly the degree of overlap in names between the tax list and the extent will be imperfect because some of the taxpayers were tenants of the second manor (Chamberlains), for which we do not have a contemporary survey-type source. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that only half of the Brays tenants of 1316 appear among the taxpayers of the preceding year. Overall, though, the Landbeach case supports the idea of a rough correlation between holding size and the propensity to contribute to the lay subsidy. Nine of the twelve villein (serf) tenants of 10-acre holdings appear on the tax list, paying tax charges in the top half of the distribution, whereas the manorial tenants who did not pay tax are generally those listed in the extent as holding plots of just an acre or less.

The next case, from Great Horwood (Buckinghamshire), gives a different picture. For this vill we have a manorial extent dated 1320 listing tenants and holdings; a ‘local’ roll listing assessed movables relating to the 1327 lay subsidy; and a series of detailed and continuous manorial court rolls.²² The gap

²¹ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Archives, CCCC 09/35/145; The National Archives (TNA), E 179/81/7, m. 5; Ravensdale, *Liable*, 153-6.

²² Oxford, New College Archives, 3912-3915 (court rolls), and 4503 (extent); TNA, E 179/242/86.

of seven years between extent and lay subsidy return is not ideal, but to some degree the excellent court rolls compensate for this, as they allow one to investigate any 1320 tenant who does not appear on the tax list. The extent covers both free and servile tenants and is organized around standard holdings of virgates (30 acres/12 ha.), half-virgates (15 acres/6 ha.), and cottages. The 1327 tax list is somewhat stereotyped, though perhaps less so than the examples considered in the previous section. For instance, eleven of the forty-two Horwood taxpayers had goods assessed at £ 1 exactly, corresponding to a tax charge of 12 d. Seven others paid 16 d. Of the thirty-seven taxpayers said to have possessed wheat, twenty-six had exactly one quarter (2,8 hectoliters), eight had two quarters, and three had three quarters, a somewhat improbable distribution. The goods assessed consist entirely of livestock and agricultural produce, the only exception being brass pots listed for 10 taxpayers.

One would hardly expect a very close match between the names on the manorial extent and those on the tax list, not least because some of the tenants of 1320 had died or otherwise ceased to be taxable household heads by 1327. We must also contend with the fact that the vill of Great Horwood (the taxation unit) did not correspond exactly with the manor of Great Horwood that is represented by the court rolls and extent. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that only twenty-one names appear on both lists; this figure represents 50% of the taxpayers. In the upper half of the taxpaying distribution (twenty-one taxpayers, charges from 16 d. to 48 d.), there are twelve individuals traceable on the 1320 extent, while in the bottom half (twenty-one taxpayers, charges ranging from 10-5 d.) there are nine. The bigger landholders – the virgaters – are not wholly concentrated at the top of the taxpaying distribution. Among the eleven paying 24 d. or more, there are five known tenants, of whom four held at least a virgate; the equivalent figures among those paying 12 d. and below (fourteen taxpayers) are five tenants, of whom three held at least one virgate. It is also useful to focus on those who are not on the tax list but are known from court roll evidence to have held land in 1327. A good example is John Frankeleyn, a prominent free tenant (as his name suggests) who held a messuage and virgate in 1320 and died in 1349 during the Black Death but was omitted from the 1327 lay subsidy.²³ Five women paid the subsidy, but there is no neat correspondence between these taxpayers' names and those of the female tenants of 1320. Indeed, at least three female tenants of 1320 known still to be holding land in 1327 were not assessed for the tax. These were Alice Durant, Alice Sare, and Matilda de Boykott, all half-virgaters. In Horwood's case, the correspondence between tax list and manorial extent is thus quite rough.

The final comparison of a community's landholding and taxation sources concerns Bockleton (Worcestershire). Here we have, first, a manorial rental of 1326-7, which lists tenant names and rent charges. Second, the record of a

²³ A "franklin" was an elite freeholder.

manor court session dated September 1326, clearly linked to the rental, gives details on the landholdings of tenants who swore fealty (homage) to the lord at this session. This document supplements the information in the rental, as many of the individuals who swore fealty also appear in the rental. Confusingly, some of the tenants who swore fealty do not appear on the rental, for reasons that are unclear. The rental and fealty list must therefore be treated as alternative yet complementary guides to peasant landholding in Bockleton in 1326-7. Finally, the entry for Bockleton in the 1327 Worcestershire 'county roll' lists a total of 17 taxpayers' names and charges.²⁴

In Bockleton's case, the tax list and the sources on landholding in the manor bear little resemblance to one another, despite all being virtually contemporary. For a start, there were over four times as many rent-paying tenants in 1326-7 as there were taxpayers. Only eight of the names on the fealty list can be found on the tax list; for the rental, the total is just five. The fealty list and rental combined yield plenty of examples of substantial peasant landholders who were not assessed for the tax. A good example is John Ragon, a villein who swore fealty in 1326 as the holder of one messuage, one virgate and four acres of land for rent of 5 s. 6 d. He also owed labour services which are detailed in the court roll. There are also, of course, several people who paid tax but to judge by the manorial evidence, did not hold land in Bockleton. The first name on the taxpayer list, John de Bockleton, is a special case, as this was the manorial lord, who would hardly be expected to appear as tenant in the rental and court. Yet the landholding status of nine further taxpayers remains a mystery.

It might seem a reasonable assumption that in the rural world of the early fourteenth century, those households with the most land tended to have the most valuable collections of movable goods, while those with little or no land similarly had fewest movables. Yet it can be surprisingly hard to establish a strong correlation of this nature using the records of individual communities. Sometimes households that do not appear to have held land were deemed wealthy enough to pay tax. Similarly, in the communities studied we find households whose acreages would place them in the peasant landholding elite, but who did not pay tax. At the level of the community, therefore, it can be misleading to think about material inequality using either landholding size or taxable wealth in isolation.

4. Alternative perspectives on material inequalities c. 1300

This section considers some fresh evidence which sheds light on households in the poorer portions – though not the very poorest – of the rural so-

²⁴ Stafford Record Office, D(W)1788/P39.B10 (rental and court rolls); *Lay Subsidy Roll*, 54-5, checked against TNA, E 179/200/1, m. 8d.

cial structure.²⁵ These include households on or just below the ‘poverty line’, as drawn by Campbell. Here the first aim is to explore, as far as possible, the full range of household material wealth, including that which was omitted from taxation but ought to be considered in discussions of inequality. The second and more important aim is to suggest that the wealth and income levels of some households possessing relatively small landholdings were as not low as one might imagine by focusing on acreages alone. The evidence discussed in this section concerns land and movable property forfeited to the crown or a landlord, and it comes from manorial records and from material in the royal archives, sometimes used in combination. Its use necessitates reliance on a tiny number of examples of uncertain representativeness. Yet the advantage is the more rounded picture such evidence provides of individual pre-plague households lying at significant points in the wealth and income distributions.

4.1 Forfeited property

Table 2 and the Appendix contain evidence on the forfeited property of eight rural individuals, each of whom was apparently the head of a household. There were three basic reasons why a landlord might claim the property of a manorial tenant as forfeit: flight from the manor; intestacy; and crime.²⁶ Typically, the manorial court rolls make only passing reference to such seized property or its value. Occasionally, however, the records provide a fuller listing of the forfeited land and goods and their values, plus useful explanatory detail. Six such manorial forfeitures from the relevant period are analysed here. They include illustrations of all three main reasons for forfeiture to manorial lord: Walter Rogier fled his manor; Richard Peper and Robert Osebern were criminals, or accused of crime (Osebern committed suicide, which was a felony, a type of serious crime); and Robert Syger and (probably) John Welleman and Nicholas le Bedell’ were intestates.

Table 2. *Stocking densities per 100 sown acres on eight peasant holdings, c. 1297-1331*

Date	Name	Arable land (acres)	Horses	Cattle (adult)	Cattle (immature)	Sheep	Swine	Total units	Stocking density
c. 1300	Reyner de Burton	8 sown ac.	2	0	1,6	0,3	0	3,9	48,8
c. 1300	John de Burton	2 sown ac.	0	1,2	1,6	0,5	0	3,3	165,0
1305	John Welleman	0,8125 ac. total	0	0	0	0,3	0,1	0,4	49,2

²⁵ On identifying the poor, see Schofield, “Searching for the poor.”

²⁶ Briggs, “Manorial Court Roll Inventories.”

1298	Robert Syger	0,44 sown ac.	0	2,4	0	0,2	0	2,6	590,9
c. 1297	Robert Osebern	11 sown ac.	1	2,4	1,6	0,1	0,4	5,5	50,0
1328	Nicholas le Bedell'	10 sown ac.(estimate)	4	1.2	0	3	0,4	8,6	86,0
1311	Walter Rogier	20 sown ac. (estimate)	0	2,4	0,8	14	0	17,2	86,0
1331	Richard Peper	4,125 ac. total	3	2,4	0,8	0,8	0	7	169,7

Note: to calculate densities, stated or estimated sown acreages have been used, except for Welleman and Peper.

Sources: *Reyner and John Burton:* TNA, JUST 2/107; *Welleman:* Cambridge, King's College Archives, COL/368; *Syger:* Norfolk Record Office, DCN 60/32/4; *Osebern:* *Luffield Priory Charters*, 356-7; *Bedell':* Stafford Record Office, D(W)1734/2/1/598; *Rogier:* Oxford, New College Archives, 3913; *Peper:* Cambridge University Library, Buxton MSS 68/7, Norfolk Record Office, WLS XXIV/1.

The crown also claimed the right to forfeitures of real and movable property resulting from crime, giving rise to another potential body of source material for the material life of poor households. Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, the English crown exercised rights to 'felony forfeiture'; that is, an entitlement to seize the goods of felons (those convicted of a serious crime, including suicides), fugitives from justice, and outlaws. To some extent the crown competed with manorial landlords in asserting rights to felony forfeiture. Records of forfeited goods connected with this prerogative and preserved in the royal archives offer insights into the material circumstances of some of society's poorest.

The evidence on felony forfeiture is especially rich for the period from c. 1370, after which date the escheator – one of several royal officials responsible at various times for the administration of felony forfeiture – began to keep more detailed records. This evidence has been used in a recent project investigating rural living standards and material culture in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁷ For the pre-plague era, however, the escheators' records are fewer and less detailed. For this earlier period, the evidence on the forfeited goods and chattels (movable possessions) of felons instead comes mainly from the archive of another royal official, the coroner, who held inquests into

²⁷ Briggs, Forward, Jervis, "Living Standards;" Forward *et al.*, *Living standards and material culture in English rural households 1300-1600*.

all unnatural and sudden deaths, as well as from the rolls produced by certain other royal law courts.²⁸ Unfortunately this pre-plague information is scantier than that contained in the later escheators' accounts and files.

The generally low recorded valuations of felons' chattels in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and the presence of many felons whose chattels were said to be worth nothing at all, have been debated by historians. Some see this as confirmatory evidence of widespread impoverishment extending beyond the famine years, while others doubt the veracity of the valuations.²⁹ To explore the issue further using coroners' rolls is difficult, since surviving examples in good condition, and of appropriate date, are scarce. Also, while the available rolls do sometimes give details on the types and values of chattels forfeited by suicides and those suspected of homicide, information about landholding is recorded inconsistently. This latter point is important, because just as landholding data on its own cannot tell the full story about a household's circumstances, equally it is essential to possess some information about landholding (or its absence) if one is to make sense of the other markers of wealth and income.

These limitations of coroners' rolls are evident in an otherwise promising example for the county of Northamptonshire which covers the period c. 1291-c. 1316.³⁰ This roll contains only two usable forfeitures with details on land: those of John de Burton and Reyner de Burton, discussed further below.³¹ Other forfeitures in the roll clearly concern people who almost certainly held land which was not recorded, presumably because not deemed to be forfeit.³²

No listing of household property connected with forfeiture, whether from manorial or royal archives, can be treated as 'complete', even if in theory the entirety of a forfeiting individual's real and movable property was supposed to be seized. Like their counterparts who assessed property for royal taxation (lay subsidies), those local people who provided details on forfeited property to a manorial lord or royal official tended to overlook low value items, and may have omitted particular goods for customary reasons. Furthermore, the goods of a felon or fugitive were liable to removal by the forfeiting individual or his family prior to appraisal. Forfeitures of the possessions of a household head leave us wondering how far items belonging to other members of the household were excluded from appraisal and seizure. Crucial areas of material life, such as housing, clothing, and holdings of cash are only illuminated indirectly, if at all.

²⁸ Given, *Society and Homicide*; Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*.

²⁹ Amor, *Keeping the Peace*, 28-30; Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*, 129-30, 307.

³⁰ TNA, JUST 2/107, at <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/JUST2/JUST2no107/>.

³¹ It may be significant that these details appear on a detached slip of parchment, not in the main roll.

³² See the long chattels lists of wealthy rural felons John le Blound and Simon son of Richard Blound, which barely mention land; TNA, JUST 2/107, m. 4A.

Interestingly, the Northamptonshire coroners' roll is perhaps most valuable for the qualitative evidence it provides on several apparently young people, not themselves householders, who forfeited personal goods.³³ For instance, early in 1307, Matilda, daughter of John le Swon of Wansford, fell while crossing the bridge at Wansford and drowned. Her body was found by fishermen who placed it in a pit, after despoiling it of a belt with purse valued at 1 d., a hood (2 d.), a brooch (1 d.) and a weed-hook ($\frac{1}{4}$ d.). In the previous year, Thomas Harding, servant of a tanner called Simon Harding (perhaps a relative), drowned himself in the River Nene below Northampton. His chattels were a *colobium* (probably a gown) and old tunic (20 d.), a hood (2 d.), a knife (1 d.), shoes and hose (4 d.). Such evidence is hard to interpret; Thomas's shoes and hose are perhaps evidence against barebones poverty, and Matilda's purse and brooch speak of a modest capacity for personal adornment. As both died away from their homes, one could make the case that they may have possessed further goods unidentified by the coroner. Equally the brevity of these lists as they stand gives a strong impression of limited material wealth.

4.2 *Stocking densities*

Stocking densities are a key consideration in the evaluation of peasant landed resources. Using the well-known, unusually detailed local rolls for the 1283 lay subsidy relating to Blackbourne Hundred (Suffolk), Slavin found a heavy focus among peasant smallholders on livestock husbandry. As he was using a lay subsidy return which records details on taxpayers' grain and livestock but not their lands, Slavin was required to estimate tenant acreages. He calculated a stocking density in livestock units per 100 sown acres of 103.2, a figure 2.2 times the average for lordly demesnes.³⁴ In commenting on the heavy peasant focus on livestock in this region of smallholdings, Slavin remarked that "it is tempting to conclude that the high stocking densities in Blackbourne villages imply a non-Malthusian reality".³⁵ It seems worth asking what the forfeiture evidence reveals about stocking densities, given the possibility that smallholding peasants in this era with access to sufficient grazing and labour with which to apply manure to the arable may have been able to achieve higher outputs, and therefore potentially incomes, than is usually indicated in studies which use demesne yields as a proxy for peasant yields.³⁶

Table 2 contains details on the forfeited livestock of peasants who possessed recorded arable landholdings of various sizes. Some of these landholdings are expressed in total acreages, and others as sown acreages. The total acreages ranged from under 1 acre/0.4 ha. (Welleman) to the half-virgates of

³³ TNA, JUST 2/107.

³⁴ Slavin, "Peasant livestock husbandry," 13-4.

³⁵ Slavin, 23.

³⁶ La Poutré, "Fertilization by manure;" Hatcher, "Peasant productivity."

approximately 15 acres/6 ha. of le Bedell' and Osebern. Rogier is the only one for whom a landed holding is not recorded, but we know he was a villein tenant, and that the villein holdings on his home manor of Great Horwood were mostly grouped into standard sizes (see above). It has been assumed therefore that Rogier held one virgate of 30 acres (12 ha.).

Following the method and weightings used by Slavin, we arrive at a range of stocking densities in livestock units per 100 sown acres for the eight forfeiting tenants. In three cases, the figures are just above the average of 47,8 calculated using manorial accounts for much larger demesne farms. In the remaining cases, the stocking densities are significantly higher. It is noteworthy that the three highest figures relate to three of the four smallest holdings. This provides broad support for Slavin's finding of an inverse correlation between stocking densities and acreages.

4.3 Movable property: case studies

The eight lists of possessions offer further insights into the material worlds of households at a range of landholding sizes. Most of the eight can be associated roughly with the groupings immediately above and below Campbell's 'poverty line': the "smallholders", with an assumed mean arable acreage per household of 5,0 ha.; and the "cottagers and agricultural labourers", with an average 0,8 ha. Walter Rogier is an exception if our assumption that he held a 30-acre virgate is correct. This would place him above the "smallholders", and within the next group up: the "yardlanders" (prosperous peasants, equivalent to virgaters), with an average of 12,5 ha. Efforts have been made to locate the eight men in lay subsidy records, in cases where the dates fit, and records survive.

The lists of forfeited possessions of Reyner de Burton and John de Burton, who were evidently suspected of the death of a man called Richard, are dateable to c. 1300. The vill of Ufford (Northamptonshire) is said to be "answerable" for their chattels. A search of taxpayers' names in the return to the lay subsidy of 1301 for Ufford failed to locate these men. The coroner's inquest states that in addition to his eight sown acres, Reyner had only his cart, livestock, grain and hay, plus (possibly) one jug valued at 4 d. John, however, who had just 2 sown acres, had a somewhat more extensive collection of household goods. These comprised a supertunic valued at 2 s., a lead (a brewing vessel, 3 d.), and "lesser things in his chest, price 2 s. 6 d.". We can only guess at the identity of these "lesser things", which were assigned a value equal to his one acre of wheat. However, they are almost certainly items that would have been overlooked by the assessors of the royal subsidy, if indeed John was ever taxed at all towards the subsidy.

The lists of John Welleman and Robert Syger take us into the world of the Norfolk smallholder of c. 1300.³⁷ The court roll entries recording Syger's for-

³⁷ See Campbell, "Agrarian problem."

feiture provide little information about him, other than the details of his land and animals, and the fact he left behind a widow and a son. John Welleman had very little arable land, but his messuage (enclosed plot) and two houses suggest he was relatively well endowed with buildings. His chattels also included cloth worth 4 s., perhaps a sign of involvement in textile production. An indication of John's probable intestacy is the order that "all his creditors and debtors" should be present at the next session of the manor court. That a man with less than an acre of arable might be expected to have debtors as well as creditors is interesting.

Robert Osebern, Nicolas le Bedell' and (probably) Walter Rogier all possessed landholdings greater than the men just discussed. As one might expect, their quantities of livestock and other movables were correspondingly larger. Most of Osebern's movable wealth consisted of livestock and grain, but he also possessed craft equipment, household goods and furnishings of a far more diverse kind than one would typically see in a 'local' lay subsidy roll. Walter Rogier forfeited just livestock and grain, plus a brass pot. The quantities are substantial, however; his large flock of 120 sheep and 20 lambs is over twice the size of the largest individual flock mentioned in Great Horwood's 1327 lay subsidy (60 sheep). Nicolas le Bedell's list similarly underlines the fact that the material culture of rural households was often somewhat richer than the lay subsidy returns indicate. At his death, Nicholas owned an iron-bound cart worth 6 s. 8 d., a brass pot and jug worth 4 s., and, most interestingly, a (probable) basin and ewer for handwashing worth 2 s.³⁸ Although a landed peasant possessing movables well over £ 3 in value when he died after November 1327, it is striking to note that Nicholas does not appear at all in the 1327 lay subsidy return of his home vill of Longdon (Staffordshire).³⁹

Finally, attention is given to Richard Peper of Bunwell, another Norfolk smallholder who is the best documented of the eight householders. Peper forfeited in 1331 after being indicted for a felony and outlawed. Unfortunately, we do not know whether he was taxed for the 1327 lay subsidy as the relevant roll is faded and illegible.⁴⁰ However, the court records of Hadeston manor in Bunwell provide some remarkably detailed information about him.⁴¹ Richard's landed holdings seem initially to have been somewhat greater than they had become by 1331, as in the mid-1320s he had granted a cottage to Roger his son, and other small amounts of land to his brother Simon and to another man. In the late 1320s Richard was engaged in litigation over debt and trespass in the Hadeston manor court. In 1327, in the most notable of these cases, he successfully sued Simon Prati for the detention of one acton (a

³⁸ The word for the item accompanying the ewer is only partly legible but is probably *peluis* (basin).

³⁹ Wrottesley, "Exchequer subsidy roll," 231.

⁴⁰ TNA, E 179/149/7, m.56d.

⁴¹ Cambridge University Library (CUL), Buxton Papers Box 68/7-8; Norfolk Record Office (NRO), WLS XXIV/1.

padded jacket worn under armour), one *colrectum* (possibly a piece of armour for the neck), and one sword, worth altogether one mark (13 s. 4 d.).⁴² This was more than the combined value of the two cows he later forfeited in 1331. This court roll evidence of Richard's ownership of armour and a weapon gives an unusual perspective on the material world of an early fourteenth-century smallholder. Indeed, the wider body of evidence on interpersonal litigation contained in these court rolls reveals the frequent enforcement of petty contracts and rights in movable property in this locality. A good example is Alice Stalkesti's successful prosecution of Simon Sparwe for unjust detention of five ells (approximately five metres) of linen cloth, worth 10 d., plus damages of just 1,5 d.⁴³ Material resources were clearly stretched for those towards the lower end of the social scale in this part of early fourteenth-century Norfolk. Yet equally, institutions for the protection of property rights were readily available, and not restricted to the peasant elite.

5. Conclusion

Land was the most important source of income in England c. 1300. It also seems reasonable to assume that wealth was related to income, and that those with the most land will tend, other things being equal, to have had the greatest wealth, and vice-versa. Yet arable acreage is not a perfect guide to income or wealth per household, both because additional sources of household income were potentially available, and because some households may have been relatively well endowed with capital, meaning that they could have enjoyed higher incomes from land than other households with similar acreages. Landholding size is therefore only an approximate guide to the distribution of income. Furthermore, the lay subsidies are only an approximate guide to the distribution of wealth, primarily because households possessing taxable wealth above the threshold were demonstrably omitted from the assessments, and perhaps also because some forms of movable wealth were present but not taxed.

If "wealth inequality can be considered a decent proxy for income inequality" in preindustrial societies,⁴⁴ it is perhaps disconcerting that the two reconstructions discussed in Section 2 give rise to rather contrasting results: Broadberry *et al.* offer a Gini coefficient for income in 1290 of 0,33, while Alfani and García Montero estimate 'reconstructed' wealth inequality in 1327-32 at 0,723-0,755.⁴⁵ At the same time, the two reconstructions 'make sense' in that they agree on England's broad characteristics in terms of the distribution of resources c. 1300. No attempt is made here to suggest that the estimates

⁴² CUL, Buxton Papers Box 68/7, July 1327.

⁴³ NRO, WLS XXIV/1, October 1324.

⁴⁴ Alfani, "Economic inequality," 10.

⁴⁵ Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, 329, table 8.07; Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth inequality," 1337.

discussed in Section 2 do not provide useful general frameworks for the analysis of inequality.

Instead, this article tries to make two main arguments. The first is that in discussing inequality, it is helpful to take a broader view of the material circumstances of households and to examine the question at the level of the community and its members. To obtain a fuller sense of the movable and immovable possessions of rural households, it has been necessary to make use of rare but valuable lists of forfeited property that survive in records generated by manors and by the crown. Clearly this analysis has not revealed the presence of an unsuspected wealth of 'non-essential' goods among the possessions of poorer households. Yet it has shown that some such households accumulated some goods that were not noticed by the royal taxers, and that they often possessed high ratios of livestock to arable land. The second point is that, as Campbell argues, there were clearly substantial differences in experience separating the upper echelons of the peasantry from the "smallholders" and the "cottagers and agricultural labourers" – the two groups lying either side of the 'poverty line' in the c. 1290 social table. Equally, however, the two latter groups should not be lumped together. These two huge categories comprised almost half of English households, on Campbell's estimate, and their material experiences covered a vast range. There is no doubt that the labouring poor and the landless often faced huge difficulties in simply obtaining the necessities of life, and that the prospects for young men and women from such backgrounds were increasingly grim at this time.⁴⁶ Yet equally it is easy to underestimate the capacity and creativity with which many households with small arable acreages sought to make a living despite the challenges of the era.⁴⁷ Hypothetical models of the smallholder economy of c. 1300 are useful, but they do not always match the evidence of the lived experiences of well-documented individuals and households.

⁴⁶ Bennett, "Wretched Girls, Wretched Boys."

⁴⁷ Hatcher, "Peasant productivity."

Appendix
Eight lists of forfeited property, c. 1297-1331

		Valuation
Name & location	Reyner de Burton Ufford (Northamptonshire)	
Date	c. 1300	
Reason for inventory	Felony suspect	
Land held	8 sown acres	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 affer	5 s.
	1 colt [young horse] age 1 year	9 d.
	2 calves	2 s.
	3 sheep	2 s. 6 d.
	1 cock and 4 hens	5 d.
Grain & fodder	1 q. + 1 "strike" wheat	3 s. 6 d.
	Hay and forage	18 d.
	3,5 acres sown with wheat	2 s. per acre
	3 acres sown with drage	12 d. per acre
	1,5 acres sown with peas	18 d. per acre
Farming equipment	1 worn iron-bound cart	3 s.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 jug? [<i>urciolus</i> ?]	4 d.
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	John de Burton Ufford (Northamptonshire)	
Date	c. 1300	
Reason for inventory	Felony suspect	
Land held	2 sown acres	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 cow	5 s.
	2 calves	4 d.

Grain & fodder	4 sheep	4 s.
	1 lamb	6 d.
	1 cock and 2 hens	3 d.
	0,5 q. wheat	20 d.
	Hay and forage	8 d.
	1,5 “strikes” peas	3 d.
	1 acre sown with wheat	2 s. 6 d.
	1 acre sown with peas	18 d.
Farming equipment	1 ladder	1 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 lead [<i>plumbum</i>]	3 d.
(b) Furnishings	“lesser things in his chest” [<i>in minimis Rebus in cista sua</i>]	2 s. 6 d.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 supertunic	2 s.
Cash	-	
Name & location	John Welleman Coltishall (Norfolk)	
Date	January 1305	
Reason for inventory	Not stated, probably intestacy	
Land held	1 messuage with 2 houses, 3,25 rods of land, & 1 rod & 3 “abut-tals” of marsh	
Other indicator of status	-	
Animals	3 sheep 1 piglet	
Grain & fodder	2 q. 1,5 b. barley 1 b. peas 1 b. beans	
Farming equipment	-	
Craft equipment/materials	Cloths	4 s.
Household goods		

(a) food preparation	-	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 tunic	10 d.
Cash	-	
Name & location	Robert Syger Hindringham (Norfolk)	
Date	May 1298	
Reason for inventory	Died intestate	
Land held	1,5 acres and 0,5 rods, plus 2 acres separately mentioned	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 cow	4 s.
	1 cow	3 s.
	2 sheep	2 s.
Grain & fodder	3 q. barley	
	2 b. beans	
	1 rod sown with wheat	
	3 parts of 1 rod sown with rye	
Farming equipment		
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	-	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Robert Osebern Thornborough (Buckingham- shire)	
Date	c. 1297	
Reason for inventory	Robert hanged himself (felony)	
Land held	1279-80 1 virgate, 1289 ½ vir- gate	

Other indicator of status	Possibly reeve 1281 [senior manorial official]	
Animals	1 old mare	12 d.
	2 cows	7 s. 10 d.
	1 steer	2 s.
	1 calf	8 d.
	4 sows	18 d. each
	1 lamb	9 d.
	3 geese	6 d.
	3 hens & 1 cockerel [<i>gallinum</i>]	4 d.
	1 cat	½ d.
Grain & fodder	5 b. wheat	2 s. 6 d.
	1 ½ b. beans and peas	7½ d.
	Chaff	3 d.
	Forage/straw [<i>foragium</i>]	2 s.
	4 acres sown with wheat	2 s. per acre
	1,5 acres sown with barley	3 s. per acre
	1,5 acres sown with beans & peas	2 s. per acre
	4 acres sown with oats	14 d. per acre
Farming equipment	1 ladder	3 d.
	1 horsehair rope	-
	Plough	5½ d.
	1 cart with full harness	8 d.
	1 winnowing fan	8 d.
	1 plough with full gear	18 d.
	1 spade, 1 ?boring tool [<i>terbula</i>] & 1 fork	1½ d.
	1 harrow	1 d.
Craft equipment/materials	1 axe & 1 bill with 2 sickles [<i>fau-</i> <i>tillis</i>]	3 s.
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot & 1 pan	3 s.
	1 vat, 3 tubs with 1 small tub	18 d.
	1 trough [<i>alveolum</i>]	4 d.
	1 tub with salt	3 d.
	1 lead [<i>plumbum</i>]; large pot for e.g. for brewing]	15 d.
	1 tripod	1½ d.
	1 grain measuring vessel [<i>batus</i> <i>ad mensurandum</i>] with 2 sieves	1½ d.

(b) Furnishings	1 basin	1½ d.
	1 coffer	18 d.
	1 form [bench] and 1 table with	6 d.
	2 trestles	
	2 baskets	1½ d.
	Towel	1 d.
	1 feather mattress [<i>plumale</i> ; possibly a pillow]	8 d.
	2 sheets	6 d.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 cloak [<i>mantellum</i>]	18 d.
	1 supertunic	6 d.
	1 hood	6 d.
Cash	-	
Other	The barn 'in which he hanged himself'	3 s.
Unidentified	1 <i>varill'</i>	4 d.
Name & location	Nicholas le Bedell' Longdon (Staffordshire)	
Date	February 1328	
Reason for inventory	Probably intestate	
Land held	1 messuage and one half-virgate, plus 1 cottage in bondage	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 ox [given as heriot]	6 s. 8 d.
	4 horses	24 s.
	4 piglets	4 s.
	30 goats	30 s.
Grain & fodder	-	
Farming equipment	1 iron-bound cart	6 s. 8 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot, 2,5 gallons & 1 jug [<i>urceolus</i>], 1 gallon	4 s.

(b) Furnishings	1 basin? and 1 ewer	2 s.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Walter Rogier Great Horwood (Buckinghamshire)	
Date	February 1311	
Reason for inventory	Fled manor	
Land held	Unknown	
Other indicator of status	Servile status [<i>nativus domini</i>]	
Animals	2 cows 1 bullock 120 sheep 20 lambs	
Grain & fodder	2 q. wheat 8 q. drage 2 q. peas 2 q. oats 3 q. mixed grain	
Farming equipment		
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Richard Peper Bunwell (Norfolk)	
Date	December 1331	

Reason for inventory	RP committed a felony and was outlawed	
Land held	1 messuage and 2,5 acres 0,5 rods of customary land; 1 acre of free land. Perhaps an additional 0,5 acre on lease.	
Other indicator of status	Hayward (a manorial official), 1331	
Animals	2 cows	5 s. 6 d. each
	1 steer	5 s.
	1 horse	4 s.
	8 sheep	18 d. each
	1 horse	3 s. (erased)
	1 colt [young horse]	2 s.
	2 geese	6 d.
Grain & fodder	2 q. barley	4 s. per q.
	Straw	2 s.
	Hay	8 d.
Farming equipment	1 coulter [front blade of a plough that made a vertical cut in the soil]	5 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot	18 d.
	1 brass pan	6 d.
	1 tripod	3 d.
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Total value	51 s. 3 d.	

Sources: see Table 2.

Note: q.=quarter (2,8 hectolitres), b.=bushel (35,2 litres).

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Financing a rebellious city. Social change, revolts, and inequality among the fiscal elite in fourteenth-century Bruges

by Sam Geens

Il XIV secolo fu un periodo tumultuoso, in cui l'Europa fu sconvolta da frequenti rivolte. Gli storici attribuiscono questi eventi all'aumento delle disuguaglianze: al contrario, l'impatto delle rivolte medievali su queste ultime è rimasto poco studiato a causa della mancanza di fonti. Il capitolo, per affrontare questo problema, ricostruisce le differenze nella ricchezza dichiarata al fisco dell'un per cento più ricco della città di Bruges, uno dei più importanti centri commerciali dell'Europa nord-occidentale. Il saggio dimostra una traiettoria stabile di queste differenze grazie al carattere aperto dell'élite cittadina in termini di ricchezza, occupazione, lignaggi e cariche. Si ritiene che ciò sia dovuto a trasformazioni sociali gradualmente e alle frequenti rivolte. In entrambe le evoluzioni, gli artigiani furono al centro della scena, cogliendo nuove opportunità nel mercato e nel governo, probabilmente a scapito delle classi inferiori.

The fourteenth century was a tumultuous period. Europe was disrupted by frequent uprisings. Historians attribute these events to rising inequality. Conversely, the impact of medieval revolts on inequality has remained understudied due to lack of sources. To address this, the chapter maps the differences in fiscal wealth for the top one per cent in Bruges, a major commercial hub in Northwestern Europe. Remarkably, it shows a stable trajectory thanks to the open character of the elite in terms of wealth, occupation, lineages, and office holding. I argue that gradual social transformations and frequent uprisings explain this. In both evolutions, craftsmen took centre stage. They seized new opportunities in the market and the government probably to the detriment of the lower classes.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Bruges, élite, disuguaglianza, rivolte.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Bruges, elites, inequality, revolts.

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1. *A changing world: introduction*

Europe's fourteenth century was marked by social unrest, as indicated by the frequent outbreaks of mass uprisings.¹ Historians have characterised the period as "a plague of insurrection" or "the age par excellence of 'popular revolutions'".² These violent conflicts were manifestations and, in turn, also drivers of profound social transformations during the Late Middle Ages. Important examples of such transformations can be seen in the major European textile industries of Flanders and Italy. Faced with severe crises in the first half of the fourteenth century due to shifting international demand and disruption of trade by warfare, these urban economies reoriented from the mass production of cheap cloths to the luxury segment of heavy woollens.³ Subsequently, some groups seized upon emerging opportunities. Above all, historians have pointed to the rise of craftsmen who were able to convert their growing economic capital into political clout often through violent uprisings. For example, one of the key demands during the famous Florentine Ciompi Revolt (1378-82) was the instalment of a new government in which minor guilds were better represented.⁴ This chapter aims to understand how the interaction between the gradual social transformations and the related outbursts of popular uprisings shaped political and economic inequalities in the fourteenth century by looking at the distribution of fiscal wealth, occupational titles, and political offices among the very top of the urban society in Bruges, the main commercial centre of Flanders.

Remarkably, the study of economic inequality has devoted little attention to this fundamental social change in European societies. Instead, scholars have focused primarily on the impact of the Black Death when discussing the fourteenth century. The changes in the functional distribution of income and the fragmentation of elite patrimonies led to a decrease in disparities in the following century and a half across the entire continent. Such a prolonged and universal egalitarian trend is extremely rare in history and explains the pre-occupation of scholars. Moreover, sources detailing the distribution of wealth are scarce before the Black Death. For the few localities with published data before 1348, most of them only pertain to a single year.⁵ As a result, only the long-term evolution of economic inequality can be assessed, making it impossible to distinguish the disruptive impact of the plague from the more gradual social transformations and the role of uprisings. An assessment of the shorter-term evolutions is however needed as the handful of communi-

¹ This research was funded by the FWO (project 1139916N) and the AIPRIL consortium at the University of Antwerp. I would like to thank all members of the Centre for Urban History in Antwerp for their useful comments. Special thanks go to Prof. Dr. Jan Dumolyn for providing the initial idea of the paper and detailed feedback on the first draft.

² Mollat, Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions*, 11; TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection*.

³ Munro, "Medieval Woollens."

⁴ Franceschi, *Oltre il "Tumulto"*.

⁵ Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality and Poverty."

ties with multiple data points before the plague pandemic paint an unclear picture. In England, some counties experienced a significant decline in inequality whereas other communities witnessed stability or a slight increase between 1280 and 1332.⁶ In the Republic of Florence, different trajectories can even be found in neighbouring localities. Between the last quarter of the thirteenth century and 1332, wealth differences declined by almost a third in the countryside of San Gimignano while it increased by five per cent in the city.⁷ For all these reasons, the chapter mainly focuses on the first half of the fourteenth century and introduces a new methodology to overcome the lack of sources. More specifically, it proposes to look at the top one per cent of households because they are most easily identifiable and disproportionately influence inequality given their substantial wealth.

In contrast to the above economic studies, popular conflicts and social transformations have been central in medieval political history. Scholars have investigated which, why, and how people revolted. In turn, these questions are usually connected to larger themes of state formation and class identity. For example, Samuel Cohn argues that the Black Death reinforced the self – and class-awareness of artisans and peasants, which greatly enhanced the number of uprisings in the second half of the fourteenth century. Many of the iconic medieval revolts did occur in this period, such as the Jacquerie (1358), the English Peasant Revolt (1381), and the already mentioned Ciompi Revolt. But this does not mean that the plague pandemic was the only or necessary cause for outbreaks. Popular uprisings were already prevalent at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Flanders and Northern France.⁸ Again, this observation underscores the importance of distinguishing the effects of social change and related revolts on inequality from those of the Black Death and subsequent plague waves.

In political history, the social extent of the fourteenth-century revolts is hotly contested. Some historians have claimed that the uprisings resulted in more ‘democratic’ urban regimes characterised by the representation of corporate associations.⁹ Others have been more critical. They contend that elected guild members still belonged to the top of society. Most importantly, Raymon Van Uytven argued that the inheritable status of patricians (called *poorterij*) was simply replaced by wealth as a selection criterion. Only a handful of families managed to accumulate the necessary capital to contest the patrician families in governing the city. He concluded rather pessimistically that “despite the recurrent uprisings and reforms, the political power always returned into the hands of the wealthy”.¹⁰ In a similar vein, Samuel Cohn

⁶ Alfani, García Montero, “Wealth Inequality,” table 3.

⁷ Fiumi, *Storia economica e sociale*; Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-Term Trends.”

⁸ Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*.

⁹ This rich tradition dates back to Henri Pirenne. See for example: Boone, “La construction d’un républicanisme;” Prak, “Corporate Politics;” Dumolyn, “Guild Politics and Political Guilds.”

¹⁰ Van Uytven, “Plutokratie in de oude democratieën,” 406.

observed that many governments of Italian city-states became increasingly oligarchic after the Black Death despite the increasing wealth of the middle classes. By the fifteenth century, class solidarity had weakened in favour of patronage networks with the elite. As a result, popular uprisings became less frequent.¹¹

The works of Van Uytven and Cohn both show that we need to integrate economic and political inequalities if we want to understand the social changes in the Late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the topic of wealth and income disparities has played only a minor role in studying popular revolt since the 1980s. Previously, political historians emphasised polarization, economic oppression, and relative deprivation as key explanations for medieval uprisings.¹² From 1980 on, however, the focus shifted to political motives, such as the representation of craftsmen in governments and the infringement of urban privileges by monarchs.¹³ Most recently, Jan Dumolyn, Wouter Ryckbosch, and Mathijs Speecke suggested reintroducing economic inequalities into the debate. Their analysis of confiscation records from the Ghent Revolt (1379–85) reveals that the majority of Bruges rebels were destitute textile workers, likely driven by concerns about living standards rather than the urban autonomy championed by their upper-middle-class allies. Accordingly, they have advocated for a socially more nuanced and multifaceted view of rebel motives.¹⁴ Although economic inequalities have thus received some attention as causes of popular conflicts in the past and may become a prominent scholarly focus again, the reverse relationship has seldom been explored: to what extent did social change and the recurrent outbreak of revolts reinforce or alter economic inequalities? What were their long-term effects on wealth disparities? And how was this translated into political power?

To bridge the divide between the political and economic historiographies, this chapter focuses on the political and economic inequalities among the elite of Bruges, defined as the fiscal top one per cent. It explores their evolving social composition across multiple uprisings in the fourteenth century, especially before the Black Death. The first section introduces the context of the uprisings together with the employed sources. It proposes that records of forced loans and taxation of the elites may help to overcome the usual problem of source availability. It argues that the political bias commonly found in such records aids rather than hinders our analysis. The next section explores two measures of elite fiscal inequality. They depict an unexpected trend, which we cannot explain without the social context. To this end, the third section analyses the impact of the social transformations and the popular uprisings on economic mobility, office holding, and occupational representation among the elite. To what extent was the top one per cent an open and diverse group?

¹¹ Cohn, *Paradoxes of Inequality*.

¹² See for example: Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free*; Mollat, Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions*.

¹³ See especially Tilly, Blockmans, *Cities and the Rise of States*.

¹⁴ Dumolyn, Ryckbosch, Speecke, “Did Inequality Produce.”

Did revolts like the Franco-Flemish War replace one plutocratic regime for another? How did the downfall of the textile industry in this period affect the wealth and occupational background of the elite? Lastly, the epilogue briefly reflects on the implications of these findings for the common citizens of Bruges.

2. Tax the rich: Bruges and its sources

Bruges offers an excellent case study because it was characterised by both the fundamental socio-economic changes and popular uprisings that we associate with the fourteenth century. The city was located near the North Sea in the County of Flanders and was one of the most important trading hubs in medieval Europe. The population of Bruges encompassed around 60.000 people at the start of the century.¹⁵ As we have seen in the introduction, the cities of Flanders faced a severe crisis when the traditional focus on the mass production of cheap textiles became less profitable. In Bruges, this occurred in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Like elsewhere, the city got a second breath by shifting to luxury woollens for the international market. Recently, Peter Stabel has argued that this conversion was complemented by the production of fashionable goods for the regional market. As a result, a far more diversified economy with a strong and varied group of craftsmen emerged by the end of the fourteenth century. According to Stabel, the transformation already started around 1300 but accelerated after the Black Death when increasing income boosted demand.¹⁶ Historians argue that the profile of the local elite changed radically in the process. When the cloth industry fell into crisis, local merchant-entrepreneurs relinquished their role in international trade to foreign, mainly Italian and Hanseatic, merchants. Subsequently, the elite increasingly assumed the roles of brokers and rentiers. Thanks to the new focus on skilled production, some craftsmen amassed wealth and joined their ranks.¹⁷ Such a change in the social composition of the city officials in Bruges has been recorded in prosopographical studies spearheaded by Jan Dumolyn and his students. They show that craftsmen not only entered the urban government from the early fourteenth century but also came to hold a majority in the following decades.¹⁸ However, the connection of this evolution to wealth and its impact on inequalities remains understudied.

Situated in the heart of the County of Flanders, Bruges was the stage of many popular uprisings and revolts. These forms of collective action chal-

¹⁵ Brown, Dumolyn, *Medieval Bruges*, 58.

¹⁶ Stabel, *A Capital of Fashion*.

¹⁷ Blockmans, "The Impact of Cities on State Formation;" Boone, Prak, "Patricians and Burghers;" Blondé, Boone, Van Bruaene, *City and Society*; Stabel, *A Social History*.

¹⁸ Speecke, "De politieke orde van Brugge;" Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen;" Espeel, "De Brugse politieke orde."

lenged the established order to achieve specific economic or political improvements. In contrast to revolutions, they did not seek to overthrow the entire social order. The adjective ‘popular’ signifies the involvement of a large share of the population. It does not pertain exclusively to the lower classes. In fact, elites often spearheaded uprisings in the fourteenth century.¹⁹ Major revolts occurred in Bruges during the Franco-Flemish Wars of 1297-1306 and 1314-6, the Flemish Peasant Revolt in 1323-8, the Artevelde Revolt in 1338-48, and the Ghent Revolt in 1379-85. These events affected most of the County. More localised uprisings are recorded in 1309-10, 1318, 1321-2, 1351, 1358-61, 1367, 1369, 1387, and 1391.²⁰ Within the limits of this chapter, it would be impossible to discuss all these episodes individually. Instead, I will mostly zoom in on the first period of revolts (1297-1316) and discuss the importance of repeated uprisings in the subsequent decades on a more general level.

To measure the impact on inequality, we need data on the entire distribution of wealth at regular intervals. However, comprehensive tax records are limited for fourteenth-century Bruges: of all preserved lists, only two feature a large share of the population. Unfortunately, they cover only a part of the city. To remedy this problem, we shift our attention to the top of society as they feature more regularly in the sources. Like most cities in this period, Bruges relied foremost on its excise duties – i.e. indirect taxes on consumption, such as beer or meat – to finance its regular expenses. However, they were often insufficient when faced with large and/or unexpected costs. In these cases, the aldermen could sell annuities to raise the necessary funds but this implied a recurring expense for a long period. The city accounts indicate that the practice remained relatively limited in Bruges.²¹ Alternatively, the entire sum could be borrowed from international creditors with the downside of having to pay high interest rates. For example, Pope Boniface VIII had to intervene and absolve all interest in 1296 when Bruges was struggling to pay off a loan acquired from the famous Crespín family of Arras.²² Lastly, the aldermen could turn to direct taxation or forced loans. The wealthiest citizens were the most logical contributors as they had the necessary capital and political investment in the city. Moreover, collecting money from a few households was cheaper and quicker than trying to tax the whole city, especially when most of them were unable to pay. As a result, the city accounts reveal a great number of levies on the wealthy for the fourteenth century.

Medieval fiscal sources come with some methodological problems. In most cases, we have little to no information about who, what, and how much

¹⁹ Dumolyn, Haemers, “Patterns of Urban Rebellion;” Castañeda, Schneider, *Collective Violence*; Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*.

²⁰ Dumolyn, Haemers, “Patterns of Urban Rebellion;” Verbruggen, *Geweld in Vlaanderen*; DeVries, “The Rebellion of Southern Low Countries.”

²¹ In the middle of the fourteenth century, the annual number of life annuities being paid out was around 150. This is similar to the number found in Aalst, a city with a population that was fifteen times smaller. Munro, “The Usury Doctrine;” Vandeburie, “De Zwarte Dood,” 277.

²² Bigwood, *Le régime juridique*, 578-83; Bigwood, “Les financiers d’Arras.”

was taxed. Without knowledge of tax rates, it is impossible to compare the absolute wealth levels and we are forced to limit our analysis to the relative differences. To maintain a consistent sample across fiscal records with varying coverage, we focus solely on the top one per cent. This approach is justified because differences in the share of included households were primarily determined by changes in the minimum wealth threshold for taxation. Thanks to readily available estimates of the total population of Bruges at different times in the fourteenth century, it is possible to select the right number of households for each list that corresponds to the top one per cent.²³ Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that we can capture real inequality. In medieval Flanders, tax officials assessed households through their perceived status and the value of different assets, such as immovable goods, annuities, or household goods. Criteria could however change over time and tax evasion was common, especially among the elite. In addition, officials used a limited set of tax dues instead of converting the total wealth of each household based on the tax rate. The method simplified the administrative process at the cost of loss of information. Depending on the level of fiscal cluttering, inequality could be significantly underreported.²⁴ For our samples, this last problem seems limited since officials employed on average one tax amount per four households.

The most important limitation for our study pertains to the social profile of the contributors. Certain groups, such as the clergy and nobility, were typically exempt from taxation in Bruges during this period. Because they were often wealthy, we are undoubtedly missing an important part of the top. For example, the abbots of the nearby abbeys of Ten Duinen and Sint Andries respectively paid the highest and third-highest contribution in the forced loan of 1379. To keep comparisons consistent across all levies, I have removed them from the sample. Nevertheless, we should be aware that we are looking only at a certain subset of citizens. This subset does not necessarily correspond to the richest part of society. In the context of frequent uprisings, political rather than economic considerations likely dictated who contributed to forced loans and taxes. On the one hand, officials could target political adversaries as a form of repression. For instance, a Florentine citizen complained in 1370 that tax officials were assigning disproportionately high assessments to Guelfs compared to Ghibellines.²⁵ On the other hand, certain households may have been eager to contribute more than their fair share because paying taxes was the hallmark of citizenship and provided status.²⁶ In many cases, taxation was the necessary precondition for political representation. Although this

²³ We have selected the top 125 households for the period 1296-1316, the top 92 households for the period 1340-8, and the top 63 for the period 1379-96. This selection is based on the demographic data found in Prevenier, "Bevolkingcijfers en professionele;" Prevenier, "La démographie des villes;" Deneweth, "Een demografische knoop;" Brown, Dumolyn, *Medieval Bruges*.

²⁴ Zoete, *De beden in het graafschap*, 55-66; Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, "Economic Inequality," 173.

²⁵ Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 94.

²⁶ Prak, van Zanden, "Tax Morale and Citizenship."

bias complicates the reconstruction of inequalities, the levies are still informative if we consider the social and political background of the contributors. Did the popular uprisings in Bruges mainly lead to the exclusion or inclusion of certain groups at the top of society? Did craftsmen use their newly found wealth to invest in citizenship? In this sense, the fiscal records are revealing for the aspirations of the elite and for perceived social inequalities, which were probably more important than real economic inequalities to contemporaries.

A focus on the changes among the top one per cent is not necessarily representative of the differences found in the entire population. Fiscal inequality among the wealthy follows its own logic and may therefore diverge from the general trend. Nevertheless, the impact of this small minority is often immense. They usually hold a large share of wealth relative to their demographic weight. For example, I have estimated that the top one per cent in Bruges held 16,2% of all communal wealth around 1300.²⁷ Recently, Guido Alfani has retraced the number of rich households and the share they owned between the fourteenth and twenty-first centuries in Europe.²⁸ He shows how extreme wealth concentration at the top often negatively influences the political decision process in favour of the richest, an argument that is also at the core of Bas van Bavel's explanation for the downturn of historic market economies. According to Van Bavel, flourishing market economies create wealth that new elites will eventually translate into political power causing polarization and a decline in the institutional ability to adapt.²⁹ In this perspective, the accumulation of wealth at the top will increase the potential for surplus extraction and hence the potential for economic inequality to rise. If this process reaches a certain threshold, social breakdown may follow in the form of rebellion or revolt. It is this relationship between inequality, economy, and politics we aim to explore for the case of Bruges. To this end, we have retraced all forced loans and taxation lists in the city accounts from the first available records until the end of the fourteenth century. Not all of them proved useful for our purposes. Some only targeted specific social or professional groups and others did not assess the wealth of households. Excluding all those, we are left with nine data points between 1296 and 1396.

The first distribution of wealth is derived from a forced loan in June 1296. Just a few months prior, the Flemish cities had agreed to financially support the French King in his war against England so they could avoid taxation by the Count for the same goal and hence safeguard their independence. Bruges donated no less than 1.500 lb. *groten Vlaams*, the equivalent of about 200.000 days of unskilled labour.³⁰ To recuperate this significant sum, the aldermen taxed the richest 675 households with the promise to reimburse their contri-

²⁷ Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour," table 5.2.

²⁸ Alfani, *As Gods among Men*.

²⁹ van Bavel, *The Invisible Hand?*

³⁰ Wages are taken from Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour," appendix 1.5 and 1.6.

bution.³¹ Although the original levy has been partially preserved, the reimbursements in the following years allow us to reconstruct the contribution of each household.³² The list predates the outbreak of the Franco-Flemish War by a single year and may therefore serve as an excellent starting point for our study. This conflict arose when Philip IV, the King of France, sought to reinstitute his authority over the County of Flanders at the end of the thirteenth century. Theoretically, this was one of the richest parts of his realm, but it had remained relatively independent. At the beginning of 1297, the quarrel between crown and vassal erupted into a full-scale war when the Flemish Count Guy of Dampierre denounced his oath of fealty to Philip in favour of an alliance with the English King Edward I. The following revolt deeply polarized Flemish communities between supporters of the crown, known as Lilies, and supporters of the Count, known as *amici comitis* in the sources. Aside from political motivations, the conflict was also inspired by socio-economic tensions. Craftsmen predominantly favoured Guy of Dampierre whereas patricians mostly sided with Philip IV.³³

The next observation pertains to the immediate aftermath of the first Franco-Flemish War. The Treaty of Athis-sur-Orge (June 1305) stipulated that the Flemish insurrectionists had to pay war reparations and a hefty annual fine. Although this provoked contestations in the next years, the aldermen of Bruges already organized a tax among 372 households in 1306 to muster the city's contribution.³⁴ Four years later, the 209 richest households were subject to a new tax to aid the war expedition against William I, Count of Hainaut and Holland.³⁵ For a long time, the Flemish counts disputed lordship over Zeeland and some lands east of the Scheldt, known as Imperial Flanders. The conflict occasionally erupted into violence. More importantly to our story of Bruges, the levy took place immediately after two minor uprisings had stirred the city. Several groups had violently expressed their discontent over the protracted peace negotiations with France. In addition, unrest had increased because the more 'democratic' experimentations with government in the wake of 1302 were being eroded.³⁶

A fourth observation can be made during the second Franco-Flemish War. This time, the successor of Philip IV tried to take control of Flanders. However, the conflict remained limited to some battles at the borders as heavy rainfall hindered an invasion. Wealthy citizens lent the city money to fit out a fleet that would protect merchant vessels harassed by French privateers in

³¹ Geirnaert, De Leeuw-Geirnaert, "Een fragment van een onbekende."

³² Wyffels, De Smet, *De rekeningen van de stad*, 578-94 and 658-75.

³³ Trio, Heirbaut, Van den Auweele, *Omtrent 1302*.

³⁴ The city accounts don't mention the reason for the tax though references to the delivery of the king's money in Paris can be found in the expenses: Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De rekeningen van de stad*, t. 1, 956-66.

³⁵ Wyffels, Vandewalle, t. 1, 1267-72.

³⁶ Speecke, "Het eerste 'democratische' regime."

1316. In total, 385 households participated in the forced loan.³⁷ Unfortunately, no lists have been preserved in the municipal archives for the next decade. This means that we cannot assess the direct impact of the Flemish Peasant Revolt (1323-8). This revolt began with farmers resisting new taxes to pay the repartitions stipulated in the Treaty of Athis-sur-Orge. Social unrest soon spread to the cities, where craftsmen and merchants opposed the pro-French policies of the new Count. As a result, the uprising became one of the largest revolts in the fourteenth century.³⁸

The next available records pertain to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War. The English King, Edward III, had prohibited all trade with Flanders because the Count had proclaimed his loyalty to the French crown. The ban on wool was especially detrimental to the urban economy. Consequently, the Flemish cities under the leadership of Jacob van Artevelde once again revolted against their overlords. In 1340, Bruges organized two taxes to finance its militia who aided the invading English army in the battles of Sluis and Saint-Omer. The two lists contain 247 unique households.³⁹ To measure inequality, I have taken the average contribution per household. The methodology is applied to other years for which we have multiple collections. In 1345, Jacob van Artevelde was murdered and the new Flemish Count, Louis II, exploited the disagreements between the insurrectionists to break the revolt.⁴⁰ It is in this final stage of the uprising that our last observation for the first half of the fourteenth century can be found. In 1347, Bruges sent troops to aid the English army in its siege of Calais. The tax list of 141 households is not only interesting to assess the impact of the Artevelde Revolt but also serves as an excellent starting point to study the effects of the Black Death, which swept through the city only two years later.⁴¹

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the fiscal system of Bruges became more pervasive as large shares of the population started to contribute to direct taxes and forced loans. The reasons for this trend are manifold but the increased wealth after the Black Death was a necessary precondition. In 1382-3, many households contributed to a housing tax and more than half of them also paid a wealth tax to help the city recover after the Battle of Roosebeke (27 November 1382).⁴² This event marked the end of Bruges' involvement in the Ghent Revolt (1379-85), a rebellion led by the son of Jacob van Artevelde that united the Flemish cities against the French crown. A forced loan among the wealthiest 145 households in 1379 allows us to assess the situation at the beginning of the revolt. The last observation is a wealth tax of 1394-6,

³⁷ Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De rekeningen van de stad*, t. 2, 1695-706; Verbruggen, "Een krijgsvloot uitgerust."

³⁸ TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection*.

³⁹ City Archive of Bruges (CAB), *Oud Archief*, City Account, 216, ff. 26r-36v, 1339-40.

⁴⁰ Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen."

⁴¹ CAB, *Oud Archief*, City account, 216, ff. 26r-30r, 1347-8.

⁴² Mertens, "Sociale geografie;" Deneweth, Leloup, Speecke, "Visualising Urban Change."

allowing us to assess inequality at the end of our period. This time, all but the poorest households contributed to the building of a new stone sluice at the outport of Damme, which was essential to the commercial flow of Bruges.⁴³ It is important to note that while this tax is socially the most comprehensive, its geographical coverage is more limited compared to the other lists we discussed. It only pertains to three of the city's six districts. Likewise, the wealth tax of 1382-3 provides only data for a single district. As a consequence, we might over – or underestimate inequality in these two periods depending on the number of households and wealth of the top one per cent living in other districts.

3. From top to bottom: fiscal inequality

To assess fiscal inequality within the top one per cent, we employ two different measures: the wealth share of the super-rich and the inverted Pareto-Lorenz Beta (β) coefficient. The first-mentioned measure is calculated by dividing the stock of fiscal wealth owned by the super-rich, defined as the top 0,1 per cent, by the total stock of fiscal wealth of the top one per cent. In other words, it shows us how much of the elite wealth is concentrated at the very top of the distribution. It serves as a proxy for the economic potential for a plutocratic rule. For example, a wealth share of 20% tells us that the super-rich contributed twice as much to taxes as we would expect based on their demographic weight. The second measure is calculated by dividing the mean tax amount among the top one per cent by the minimum amount of the same group (i.e. P99 or the cut-off point to belong to the top one per cent). The β coefficient informs us about the thickness or kurtosis of the upper tail of the distribution. For example, a result of 3,00 implies that the average household in the top one per cent was taxed thrice as much as its poorest peer.

The choice for the two measures is not random. In inequality studies, the wealth share of different subgroups at the top relative to the total stock is one of the most common and intuitive statistics reported. While the β coefficient is less popular, it is still often used in more specialised studies because it can be calculated from tabulated data, a common feature of present-day data sets.⁴⁴ While values typically range from 1,00 to 3,00 for income distributions, the β coefficient for wealth can return much higher results. In addition, I have chosen the two measures because they have different sensitivities. Whereas the wealth share is heavily informed by the highest tax amount, the β coefficient is more dependent on the lowest. Accordingly, together they may help to

⁴³ De Meyer, "De sociale structuren te Brugge."

⁴⁴ Atkinson, Piketty, Saez, "Top Incomes," 679-81; Alvaredo, Atkinson, Morelli, "Top Wealth Shares."

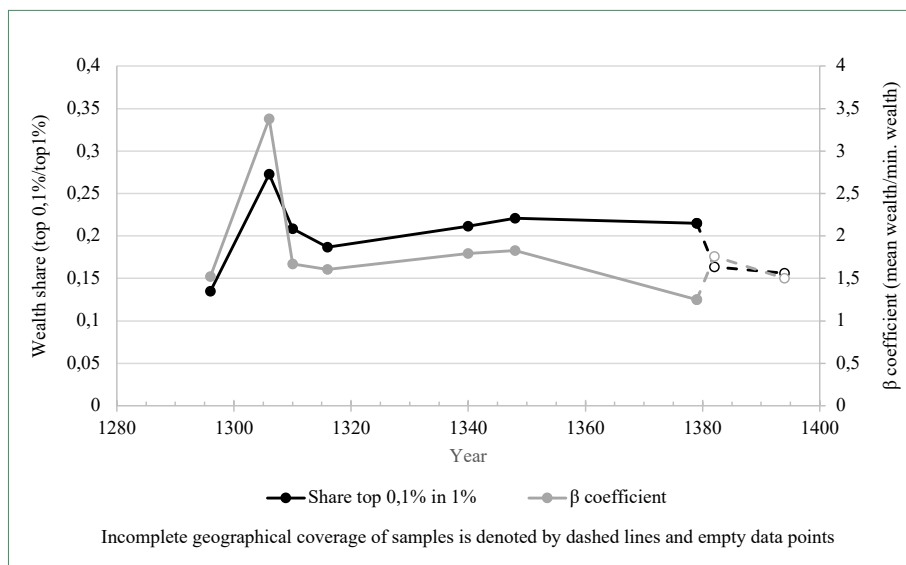


Figure 1. *Fiscal inequality within the top 1% of Bruges (1296-1396)*

Sources: see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35.

overcome any problems arising from fiscal clustering at the top or bottom of the distribution.

The results for the direct taxes and enforced loans in Bruges can be seen in Figure 1. The wealth share and the β coefficient showcase a very similar trend. In the long run, both series depict remarkable stability. The super-rich contributed a fifth of the elite taxes in this period and the average household possessed about 1,5 times more fiscal wealth than the poorest member of the top one per cent. This is surprising in light of the many uprisings and the socio-economic transformations in early fourteenth-century Bruges.⁴⁵ We would expect that the gradual replacement of the merchant-entrepreneurs by brokers and craftsmen as local elites had a large impact on inequality. After all, the former group is considered to be much wealthier than the latter. Disparities logically would increase sharply early on when some merchant-entrepreneurs were still present among the elite. Aside from this relative evolution, the results are also surprising in absolute terms. The disparity among the fiscal elite is limited if we compare it to some other cases. For example, we can find a wealth share of 30,5% and a β coefficient of 2,11 in 1352 in Florence, a city that was very similar in size at that time (9.955 households versus 9.200 in Bruges in 1347).⁴⁶ The results for Bruges instead resemble the levels found

⁴⁵ See above the section 2.

⁴⁶ Own calculations from State Archive of Florence, *Estimi*, Gabella della sega, 306, 1351-2.

in much smaller cities. In 1325, the population of Prato was three times less numerous (3,377 households) but the super-rich owned about 17% of the total elite fiscal wealth. The β coefficient was also similar with a value of 1,54.⁴⁷

Moving to the short term, some (minor) fluctuations are visible. Inequality demonstrates a clear spike in 1306 though it rapidly returns to its previous levels in the following decade. As such, the impact of the first Franco-Flemish War seems very temporary and that of the second negligible. Disparities among the rich then increased slightly over the next decades, reaching a new peak in 1347. Again, the Artevelde Revolt does not seem to have affected inequality at the top in a substantial way. The precise impact of the Black Death is difficult to measure because we lack an observation of its immediate aftermath. Nevertheless, both series still register (a slight) decline in elite wealth differences in 1379 though we should note that the β coefficient is probably underestimated due to fiscal clustering at the bottom. The forced loan shows much more diversity at the top of the distribution, which is why the wealth share is probably more accurate. The issue may also explain why our two series exhibit a unique divergence in trends for the subsequent data point. The wealth share suggests a clear decline whereas the β coefficient implies an increase after the Ghent Revolt. The analysis is further complicated by the limited geographical coverage of the 1382-3 tax. Nevertheless, we may assume that the egalitarian trend is more plausible based on a study of probated wealth in the nearby city of Ghent between 1370 and 1400. Here, disparities among the middle and higher classes leaving an inheritance declined during the Ghent Revolt.⁴⁸ Despite the outbreak of some minor uprisings in the following years, wealth inequality in Bruges remained stable among the top until the end of the century.

4. We are the one per cent: the evolving social composition of the elite

So how should we interpret these results? Why does elite wealth inequality remain so stable during one of the most transformative and tumultuous periods in Bruges' history? To answer these questions, we must turn to the social composition of the fiscal elite. Below, we first explore how permeable the top one per cent was for individuals and families. On the one hand, significant and continuous changes in the top one per cent could indicate difficulties in accumulating wealth over extended periods and signal a broad scope for elite citizenship. Fiscal inequality is kept in check by the regular rise and fall of individuals and families who want to invest in the urban community. On the other hand, compositional shifts might also be a reflection of the political turmoil.

⁴⁷ Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-Term Trends." For the distribution, see the EINITE database: www.dondena.unibocconi.it/EINITE.

⁴⁸ Geens, "The Great Destruction."

Rival governments, both populist and traditional, may have used taxation and expulsion as weapons against their political opponents. A stable profile of the top one per cent would indicate a hereditary elite. After establishing the level of permeability, we turn to the economic and political evolutions to explain the (lack of) changes in the social composition. The hypothesis is that the crisis of the traditional industries and the recurrent outbreak of popular uprisings questioned policies that favoured the top of society. Given that we cannot reliably identify the top one per cent in the second half of the fourteenth century due to the limited geographic coverage, we will focus the analysis on the first half.

Table 1. *Persistence of the top 1% (share of a cohort identified in next levies) of Bruges (1296-1340)*

A. Individuals					
	Cohort				
Levy	1296 (N= 154)	1306 (N= 169)	1310 (N= 134)	1316 (N= 153)	1340 (N= 92)
1296	-				
1306	3,9%	-			
1310	16,2%	2,4%	-		
1316	13,6%	3,0%	11,9%	-	
1340	1,3%	1,8%	1,5%	5,9%	-
1348	1,3%	0,6%	1,5%	7,2%	33,7%
B. Families					
Levy	1296 (N= 116)	1306 (N= 157)	1310 (N= 120)	1316 (N= 120)	1340 (N= 83)
1296	-				
1306	20,7%	-			
1310	33,6%	12,1%	-		
1316	36,2%	18,5%	31,7%	-	
1340	18,1%	12,1%	17,5%	23,3%	-
1348	19,8%	7,6%	18,3%	20,8%	42,2%

Sources: see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35.

Table 1A quantifies trends in upward and downward social mobility by measuring the persistence of individuals from one tax list or forced loan to subsequent levies. The personal names recorded by tax officials were varied (i.e. very few homonyms) and often included additional information, such as familial ties or physical characteristics (e.g. son of, the old, the tall). They were also consistent, making it possible to identify individuals with great certainty across multiple lists. Overall, the figures in Table 1A are pretty low. For example, the persistence rate during the relatively calm period between 1310 and 1316 is about one in ten, which suggests that the elite were a rather

permeable group. This idea is confirmed if we shift our focus from those that remained within the top one per cent to the newcomers. On average, the share of names that did not feature in any previous tax or loan was 79,9% per levy. However, these statistics obscure important differences between years. The persistence rate between 1340 and 1347 is much higher than those reported for the early fourteenth century (see Table 1A). Part of the explanation must be sought in the timing of the two levies. Both took place when the Artevelde revolt was still ongoing. As a consequence, we lack observations of the biggest disruptions, namely the initial outbreak in 1338 and the repression by the count in 1348.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it seems that the years of the revolt were less impactful than the Franco-Flemish Wars had been for the top.

At the other end of the spectrum, the persistence rates for individuals in 1306 were very low (maximum 3% can be found in subsequent levies). In addition, virtually all of them were newcomers in the top one per cent (96,4% of the total). So, what was happening? As mentioned earlier, 1306 marked the end of the first Franco-Flemish War. Four years earlier, the Lillies had fled Bruges, either voluntarily or forced to do so by the *amici comitis* amidst the unfolding revolt. Consequently, their houses and belongings were confiscated by the new governing body. In all likelihood, many of the exiled Lillies had not yet returned to Bruges or were having difficulties reclaiming their properties at the time of the levy.⁵⁰ To test this hypothesis, I retraced the political affiliation of individuals mentioned between 1296 and 1316.⁵¹ This was possible for 25,7% of all cases but the success rate was much higher for the first levy (52,6%). The data shows that although both parties were roughly similar in size before the outbreak of the war (36 Lillies versus 45 *amici*), not a single Lilly could be identified in the tax of 1306. This suggests that the taxation was probably connected to the punishment of the rebellious *amici comitis*. The repression did not last, however. The persistence rate for the cohort of 1306 is very low. Lillies contributed again in the next levies. This is also visible from the rising persistence rate for the cohort of 1296 in 1310 (from 3,9% to 16,2%). These observations may also explain the sudden spike in fiscal inequality between the first two data points. In 1296, Lillies paid on average more than *amici comitis* (contributing 117,2 d. par. versus 95,9 d. par.). The repressive nature of 1306 implied the taxation of less wealthy households to finance the repartitions. Some of the top contributors could be found in the lowest ranks of the tax in 1296 and many others were completely new. For example, Jan Musecoeninc, who barely ranked within the top five per cent before the war, paid the second-highest due in 1306.

⁴⁹ Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen."

⁵⁰ Dumolyn, Pajic, "Enemies of the Count."

⁵¹ Names were checked against lists derived from: Verriest, *Le registre de la loi*; De Smet, "De Inrichting van de Poorterlijke;" Wyffels, "Een 'opstand' te Brugge;" Verbruggen, "Beschouwingen over 1302;" Van den Auweele, "De Brugse gijzelaarslijsten;" Prevenier, "Leliaards en klauwaards;" Vandermaesen, "De confiscatie van goederen."

Individual experiences are only one part of the story. Persistence rates decline as levies are further removed from an individual's initial observation due to increased mortality. Very few can still be observed after twenty years. In contrast, wealth does not cease to exist at the death of its owner. Many goods are passed on to the children or other kin. Nobility often followed deliberate strategies that favoured the eldest son to prevent the fragmentation of the patrimony, but it is unclear if urban elites in early fourteenth-century Bruges were already imitating this pattern as they would in later periods.⁵² It is therefore necessary to assess to what extent families were able to consolidate their position in the top one per cent. Familial persistence rates are reported in Table 1B. Unsurprisingly, they are higher than the individual rates. Nevertheless, they are still low. In the long run, only one in five families was able to remain at the top of the fiscal pyramid. The most successful lineage was the Bonin family with ten different members recorded in the top one per cent. Known for the building of their grand urban palace called the Seven Towers (see Figure 2), they constituted one of the most famous families of Bruges.⁵³ Other successful lineages with more than five members include Hertsberghe (9 members), Cant (9), Dop (8), Calkers (7), Deken (7), Danwild (6), and Grand (6). This does not mean that the top one per cent was dominated by a select few families. Two-thirds of the families (65,5%) only boosted one member in the taxes or loans. On average, about half of the surnames (54,8%) were new per levy. Admittedly, we only have information about the paternal line so the figures are probably too low. Lineages sometimes died out in the male line. The inheritance was passed on to a daughter and, after her, to the grandchildren who were named after their father. But even if we double the persistence rates in Table 1B, more than half of the contributors would still be unaffiliated with a family that already belonged to the top one per cent.

If we move from the general level to the evolution of openness, we can observe the same outliers as we have for the individual persistence rates (i.e. 1306 and 1347). More interestingly, we can also observe a fundamental change in the concentration of fiscal wealth by certain lineages. In the tax of 1296, one-fourth of the families (24,7%) had at least two contributing members. By 1310, this share had declined by more than half (10,4%). The first Franco-Flemish War seems to have had a large impact on the composition and dynamics of the top one per cent. The low levels of lineage dominance would persist for the remainder of the first half of the fourteenth century. Between 1340 and 1347, the share of families with more than one contributing member was still only 14,1% on average. As such, both upward and downward social mobility in the top one per cent must have been high.

One of the potential reasons for the increasing permeability of the top one per cent relates to the already-mentioned socio-economic transformations.

⁵² Dumolyn, "Patriarchaal patrimonialisme."

⁵³ Gailliard, *Bruges et le Franc*, 298-341.

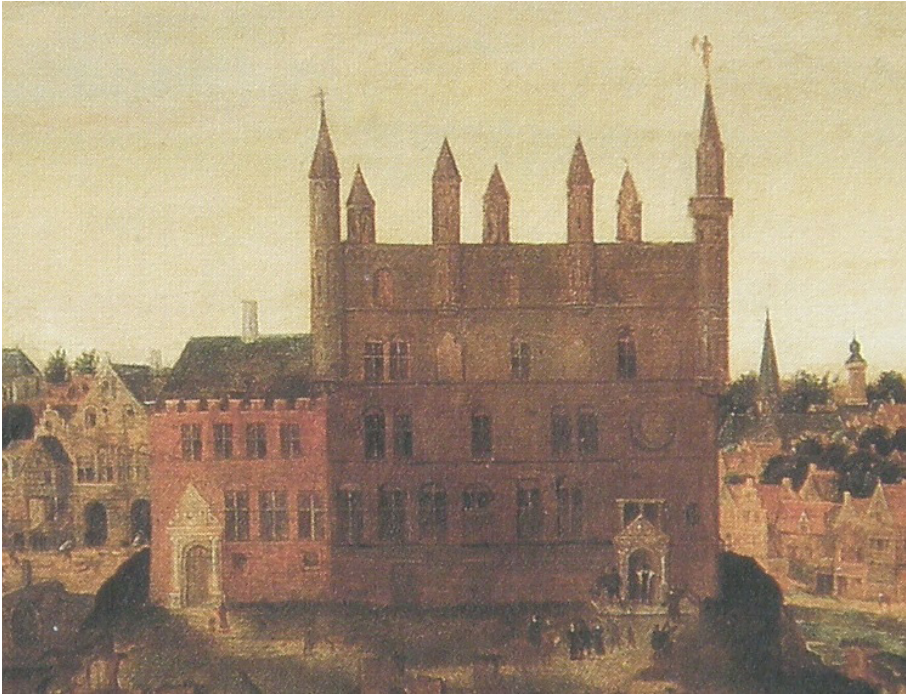


Figure 2. Pieter Claeissins de Oude, *Septem Admiraciones Civitatis Brugensis*, 1550
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Septem_Admiraciones_Civitatis_Brugensis.jpg.

To test this idea, we explore the average contribution and the occupational composition of the fiscal elite. Looking at the first variable, we can see that the fiscal burden (or investment) expressed in the number of days worked by an unskilled labourer continuously declined during the first half of the fourteenth century: from 950 workdays in 1296 to 187 workdays in 1347. Although the size of the levies was partly dependent on the size of the expenses, the evolution seems in line with the unfolding economic crisis and the declining absolute levels of wealth among the local elite. The only exception to this trend is the tax of the *amici comitis* in 1306. Remarkably, the mean levy among the top one per cent was only equivalent to 20 workdays. In other words, the financial punishment of the rebels was marginal when compared to the other levies. In combination with the lack of additional repressive tax registers in this period of frequent uprisings, this observation suggests that Bruges was mainly focused on reconciliation after conflict. This policy has also been observed by other historians in the grants of pardons and the organization of processions to bolster communal feelings.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, punishment was

⁵⁴ See for example: Speecke, “Het eerste ‘democratische’ regime.”

not completely absent. As we will see, the most prominent rebels were often expelled from the city for several years.

The second socio-economic transformation pertains to the changes in the occupational structure of Bruges. Unfortunately, most levies do not mention this type of information. Some historians have tried to overcome the issue by cross-referencing the names of individuals in other sources, such as city accounts.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding some important results, the link is sometimes uncertain, and data is missing for the majority of individuals. I have therefore followed a different approach. The levy of 1316 was not organized according to geographical but occupational criteria. The obvious advantage is that we have information for every household. The downside is that we fail to capture any secondary occupations. This is important because many people were active in different fields. Moreover, the officials also included a category of patricians (*poortertij*). This concept does not relate to a particular occupation but to privileged status. For our purposes, I have equated this category with the traditional establishment. The levy of 1316 reveals that the vast majority of elite households (92,3%) still belonged to this patriciate. A small upcoming group was that of the hostelers and brokers (6,2%) but the overlap between the two groups was large. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that some patricians were identified with their guild membership while others were not. For example, the officials recorded that Gillis van der Leye was a cloth cutter but still categorised him as a patrician. The rise of new groups is most visible in two other contributors. The hammersmith Pieter de Kettelare was the 47th richest person on the list (out of 125) and the mattress maker Lamsin van Heedelheem ranked last among the top one per cent.

The results show that the source of wealth was indeed shifting from one regime to another, but the transformation was far from complete in the first decades. The speed of change and its impact on the top is difficult to measure because we lack similar data for the fourteenth century. However, an occupational categorisation can be found in a tax list of 1411. This time the patricians only constitute 12,7% of the top one per cent, which is similar to the importance of hostellers and brokers (14%), weavers (12,7%), and dyers (11,3%). The other half of the list features individuals from no less than eighteen different occupations! While they include prestigious and de facto hereditary professions such as bakers and butchers, they also pertain to more common and open occupations like masons or glovers.

Changing economic opportunities may certainly explain why social mobility among the elite was high in the very long term but it does not explain why a change was already visible in the first decade of the fourteenth century. To this end, we turn our attention to the role of revolts and uprisings. Many historians have pointed out how the first Franco-Flemish War heralded

⁵⁵ For Bruges, see: De Meyer, "De sociale structuren te Brugge."

the breakthrough of the middling groups in the political system.⁵⁶ In Bruges, nine of the thirteen positions as aldermen and council members were reserved for guild members from 1304 on. Patricians claimed the remaining four. Whereas popular regimes were short-lived in many other parts of Europe, the power of guilds in the urban governments of this area would remain substantial during the late medieval period. This does not mean that their position was uncontested. Between the outbreaks of large revolts, patricians often managed to reclaim some of their influence. In Bruges, this happened especially in 1311-23 and 1328-38. The intense competition for power prevented one group from dominating the political landscape for extended periods. Policy choices, such as taxation, were thus never structurally catered to the benefit of one party. Several studies have analysed this phenomenon in great detail through the occupational background of aldermen.⁵⁷ Here, we try to link the political office holding with fiscal wealth to test the hypothesis of Van Uytven: was Bruges a plutocracy?

Van Uytven substantiated his claims by cross-referencing the names of aldermen with taxation records for several cities in the Low Countries. He observed that more than half of the aldermen belonged to the wealthiest classes in most cases. However, his data pertained predominantly to the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵⁸ By this period, revolts had already taken a different character. Political representation took a back seat to the battle against the centralization efforts of the Burgundian Dukes. New social classes, like craftsmen, had largely succeeded in gaining a place in the city government but were now confronted by the growing power of the dukes. For example, the introduction of a permanent, central appeal court undermined the autonomy of the urban justices.⁵⁹ In Van Uytven's study, the only sample for the first half of the fourteenth century encompassed the already mentioned levy of Bruges in 1316. Most tellingly, it showcased the lowest level of plutocracy. Nevertheless, Van Uytven rapidly dismissed it as a relic from the first Franco-Flemish War that was already erased in the next decade. The database of taxes and loans collected for this chapter allows us to test if the revolt of 1297-1306 fundamentally changed the link between fiscal wealth and political representation and if this change was only temporary. To this end, I cross-referenced all contributors with the names of aldermen elected five years before and after a levy.⁶⁰

Table 2 shows the results on an individual and family level. The figures do not collaborate Van Uytven's interpretation of a closed political elite based on wealth, at least within the case of Bruges. He severely underestimated the

⁵⁶ See above the section 2.

⁵⁷ See above the footnote 18.

⁵⁸ Van Uytven, "Plutokratie in de oude democratieën," 406.

⁵⁹ Dumolyn, Haemers, "Patterns of Urban Rebellion."

⁶⁰ Information on the aldermen was derived from Hilderson, "Schepenbank en patriciaat;" Le-noir, "De politieke verhoudingen;" Speecke, "De politieke orde van Brugge."

egalitarian effect of the first Franco-Flemish War and subsequent uprisings. More than one-third (36,8%) of the individuals in the tax of 1296 would serve as an alderman. In contrast, the probability of becoming elected halved during the first half of the fourteenth century (on average, 15,5% of contributors became aldermen). Likewise, the elite families of this period claimed almost all offices (97,1%) between 1291 and 1301. Afterwards, this figure plummets to circa 55%. In other words, half of the policymakers did not belong to the top one per cent either through their own or familial fiscal wealth. A true plutocratic regime never materialised in the first half of the fourteenth century.

Table 2. *Share of aldermen belonging to the top 1% in of Bruges (1291-1352)*

Tax	Share of contributors that were/became aldermen (N= 134)	Period of offices	Share of offices held by families that belonged or would belong to 1% (N= 430)
1296	36,8%	1291-1301	97,1%
1306	8,0%	1301-11	55,2%
1310	13,6%	1305-15	55,2%
1316	28,8%	1311-21	63,5%
1340	10,9%	1335-45	55,1%
1347	16,3%	1342-52	54,1%
Total	19,6%	1291-1352	62,4%

Sources: for the levies, see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35; for the names of aldermen, see footnote 43.

Aside from broader political representation, revolts also impacted inequalities in a more direct way. One of the most common tactics during uprisings in fourteenth-century Flanders was the temporary or, less commonly, permanent expulsion of opposing groups through forced pilgrimages, hostage-taking, or outright banishment. In many cases, their goods were also confiscated. As we have seen, this happened to the Lillies in the first Franco-Flemish War. Similarly, the subsequent peace treaty of Athis-sur-Orge (June 1305) forced 3.000 rebels from Bruges and its hinterland to go on a pilgrimage. This obligation was eventually bought off, but important waves of expulsions did occur during many following revolts, especially the Flemish Peasant Revolt in 1323-8, the Artevelde Revolt in 1338-48, and the uprising of 1358-61. Although random individuals from the opposing group could be chosen as an example, punishment usually focused on the leaders, which often included elite members.⁶¹

The (temporary) expulsion of elites must have impacted inequality in a sudden manner. Politically, offices became vacant for members of another fac-

⁶¹ Dumolyn and Pajic, "Enemies of the Count;" Jan Herwaarden, *Opgelegde bedevaarten*.

tion. Economically, the confiscated goods were used to finance government expenditure, effectively redistributing wealth to the wider urban community. For Bruges, the scale of disruption caused by expulsions can be gauged through hostage lists from 1301, 1305, 1328, and 1351. Although banishments and forced pilgrimages also occurred during this period, the 1.740 names on the lists already provide a valuable picture.⁶² I therefore cross-referenced the names with those in the levies of the first half of the fourteenth century. The exercise reveals that at least 65 members of the fiscal top one per cent had been the target of expulsion, roughly one in ten (9,5% of the taxed households). Among them, we can find the wealthiest members of the elite. For example, Martin Coopman paid the second-highest contribution in the tax of 1347 before being taken hostage in 1351. Similarly, the already-mentioned, politically influential families did not escape punishment: Lamsin Bonin, Johannes Cant, Walter Danwild, and Gillis Hersberghe all feature on the list of 1301. In combination with changing economic opportunities, the recurrent outbreaks of uprisings thus resulted in a relatively open and egalitarian group of elites, particularly through representation in the government as well as the regular expulsion of its members and the confiscation of their goods.

5. Pro bono communi: *epilogue*

The fourteenth century was one of the most transformative episodes in Bruges' history. Historians have pointed to the rise of the craftsmen and their guilds but their coming to power was not evident. Their privileges would regularly be challenged by the old establishment of patricians. Repeated revolts and uprisings continuously shifted the balance of power and the severe crisis of the traditional industries cut profits. Unsurprisingly, few elite families were able to hold on to their wealth. The composition of the top one per cent was in a constant state of flux. Not a single group was able to dominate this volatile landscape. As a consequence, fiscal inequality between the rich remained in check during the entire fourteenth century. The Black Death may have contributed to this stable trend, adding even more disruption into the equation, but its origins were clearly related to the first Franco-Flemish War when middling groups claimed their political rights through violent means. The fiscal basis for citizenship expanded. Tax lists reveal that this movement was not hijacked by a select few *nouveaux riches* for many decades. Half of the aldermen did not belong to the top one per cent. As such, policy potentially favoured a larger share of the population than before. In this sense, the stable differences between the elite might be an indication of declining economic and political inequality in the wider society. The limited appearance of

⁶² The names can be found in Van den Auweele, "De Brugse gijzelaarslijsten;" Lenoir, "De politieke verhoudingen."

craftsmen in the top one per cent by 1316 certainly hints at the potential for upward mobility of new groups. However, we should not jump to conclusions too quickly. The decline of the traditional textile industry entailed a loss of opportunities for the lower classes. The new luxuries and fashionable goods required far less unskilled labour in favour of highly skilled craftsmen. Craft guilds were primarily aimed at protecting the fortunes and rights of this last group. If the evolution of unskilled real wages is indicative of the experience of the lower classes, the first Franco-Flemish War probably ushered in a prolonged period of misery.⁶³ It would therefore be misleading to label the revolts of the first half of the fourteenth century as fully egalitarian or even democratic as some historians have done in the past.⁶⁴

⁶³ Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour."

⁶⁴ Verbruggen, *Vlaanderen na de Guldensporenslag*, 154-65.

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Economic inequality in early fourteenth-century Siena and in its countryside: evidence from the *Tavola delle Possessioni* (1316-20)

by Davide Cristoferi

Il saggio presenta la prima analisi statisticamente aggiornata delle disuguaglianze economiche nella Siena del primo Trecento e in tre insediamenti rurali, integrando un database esistente con uno studio di prima mano della *Tavola delle Possessioni* (1316-8), il più antico e completo catasto di una città medievale italiana. Per Siena, si dimostra il più alto livello di disuguaglianza economica in Toscana precedente al 1348 e si analizza la distribuzione della proprietà immobiliare sia a livello geografico che per gruppi familiari. Lo studio della campagna senese ha ancora carattere preliminare e si concentra invece sulla contestualizzazione delle evidenze statistiche trovate a livello agrario e socio-economico.

The paper presents the first statistically up-to-date analysis of economic inequality in early fourteenth-century Siena and in three rural settlements by integrating an existing database with a selected study of the *Tavola delle Possessioni* (1316-8), the earliest and most complete fiscal cadaster for an Italian medieval city. For Siena, the paper shows the highest level of economic inequality in Tuscany before 1348 and analyzes the distribution of immovable property at both geographical and household levels. The study of the Siennese countryside is still preliminary and contextualizes the statistical evidence found at the agricultural and socio-economic levels.

Medioevo, inizi secolo XIV, Toscana, Siena, proprietà immobiliare, disuguaglianze economiche.

Middle Ages, early 14th century, Tuscany, Siena, immovable property, economic inequality.

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1. Introduction

Tuscany is one of the key regions for studying economic inequality in pre-industrial Europe because of its historical relevance and the wealth of sources available.¹ This is even more evident when we look at the late Middle Ages and, in particular, the fourteenth century.² As Guido Alfani's EINITE project's extensive exploration of pre-industrial European tax records has shown, only the Tuscan cities of Prato and San Gimignano, the rural communities of Poggibonsi, Impruneta and Antella, and the villages of the district of Lucca (*Sei miglia*) appear to have sufficient and detailed tax sources to reveal levels of inequality for this period, especially before and after the Great Plague of 1347-52.³ In addition to Tuscany, the bourg of Toulouse and Albi in Southern France and the city of Tortosa in Catalonia should also be considered, as they have tax records before and after the Black Death, while Chieri and Cherasco in Piedmont, Perugia in Central Italy, and Quedlinburg in Germany have data only for pre-Black Death period.⁴ Moreover, incomplete tax rolls in Florence and London have been recently used to reconstruct hypothetical wealth distributions for the first half of the fourteenth century.⁵ Finally, in terms of rural inequality, only seven German parishes in the district of Buttelstedt, together with Tuscany, have preserved tax records from before the Great Plague, according to the current state of research.⁶

All this evidence points to high economic inequality in the first phase of the so-called conjuncture of the fourteenth century, i.e. *before* 1347, while at the same time helping to understand the long-term trends in wealth concentration in the pre-industrial era and the inequality-reducing effects of the

¹ This paper is part of the EI-MED research project funded by the FWO (no. 12Z8221N, 2020-3) at the University of Ghent and by the FNRS (no. 40005274, 2023-6) at the Université libre de Bruxelles. I am grateful to Michele Pellegrini, in charge of the *Tabula* project at the University of Siena, for providing the unpublished dataset and the digital edition of the *Tavola delle Possessioni*, for hosting me as a visiting researcher in February 2022 at the Department of History and Cultural Heritage, and for his scientific support during the writing of this article. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the XIX World Economic History Congress in Paris (July 2022) and at the European Social Science History Conference in Gothenburg (April 2023): I am very grateful to Guido Alfani and Fabrice Boudjaaba, respectively, for organizing the WEHC panel, and to Peter Lindert and Antoni Furió for their comments. I would also like to thank Riccardo Turati for guiding me through the Stata software analyses and Guido Alfani for discussing the data problems and their solutions, together with the anonymous reviewer for the helpful comments provided. Responsibility for the content and results is, of course, mine.

² See Figure 1 in my introduction to the volume.

³ Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends;" Ammannati, "La Peste Nera."

⁴ Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial;" Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Northwestern;" Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial" and the chapter by Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget in this volume.

⁵ Geens, "A Golden age," 265-7 and Appendix, 103-5; Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth inequality."

⁶ See Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," Appendix. In general, see: Alfani, Thoen, *Inequality*.

Black Death.⁷ This diachronic approach (and the relevance of the inequality-reducing effect of the Great Plague) has so far prevailed, which explains why a comprehensive study of economic inequality before the pandemic, when European society was at a turning point between its economic and demographic peak and its imminent decline or transformation, is still lacking and its causes have not yet been fully investigated.⁸ This is particularly detrimental both to the understanding of the socio-economic transformations that occurred between c. 1300 and c. 1350, and to the debate on the explanatory factors of pre-industrial economic inequality.⁹

In this respect, the quantity and quality of Tuscan fiscal sources can be further exploited to improve our understanding of economic inequality in this phase of the late Middle Ages. In particular, the study of the so-called *Tavola delle Possessioni* of Siena (1316-20) – one of the earliest and most complete surviving medieval cadasters, and the only one available for a major Italian medieval city before the Black Death – goes in this direction. This source records the distribution of immovable property (land and buildings) among the lay, noble and religious inhabitants of Siena, its suburbs and hundreds of Sienese rural communities during the second decade of the fourteenth century. Due to the huge amount of information, the divergent fiscal policies and the obvious administrative problems, this monumental fiscal record was not repeated and thus deprived of any counterpart for subsequent periods.¹⁰ Because of this gap, recent studies of economic inequality have often ignored the *Tavola*, despite its unique wealth of information and wide geographical scope which attracted renowned medievalists in the past.¹¹

This paper aims to demonstrate the relevance of the *Tavola* for the study of economic inequality during the first phase of the conjuncture of the fourteenth century and to provide statistical up-to-date data for further comparisons. Indeed, the lack of other comparable observations for this source can be overcome by using cross-sectional (i.e. synchronous) analyses between different samples or areas, rather than a longitudinal comparison between two chronological data points. Although the first method cannot detect a trend in economic phenomena such as wealth concentration or social mobility, it does have some advantages.¹² First, it allows us to a) increase the data available for the pre-Black Death period; b) explore the structure and some causal mech-

⁷ Alfani, "Epidemics."

⁸ For the conjuncture of the fourteenth century, see: Bourin, Carocci, Menant, To Figueras, "Les campagnes;" Bourin, Drendel, Menant, *Les disettes*; Bourin, Menant, To Figueras, *Dynamiques*; Drendel, *Crisis*; Grillo, Menant, *La congiuntura*.

⁹ See my introduction to this volume.

¹⁰ The only exception is the *lira*, a kind of *estimo*. There are three more complete series for the second half of the fifteenth century: Piccinni, Catoni, "Famiglie."

¹¹ Cherubini, *La proprietà*; Cherubini "Proprietari;" Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena*, 113-44; Pinto, "Ricchezza."

¹² Concerning social mobility, see: Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social mobility*.

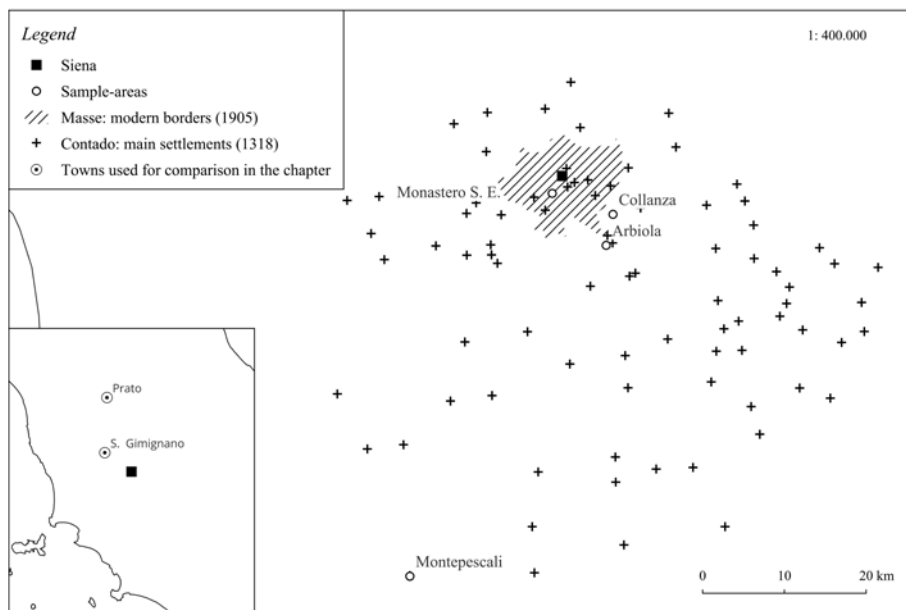


Figure 1. *Siena and the sample areas in the early fourteenth century*
 Source: elaboration of the author.

anisms of late medieval economic inequality; c) compare the representativeness of the other available observations.¹³

The paper examines the distribution of (immovable) wealth as a proxy for economic inequality at two levels: first, in the city of Siena, where an existing unpublished dataset has been adapted and integrated for this study. Secondly, in three sample areas in the countryside: one of the suburbs of Siena (Monastero Sant'Eugenio, although included in the city's fiscal district) and two rural settlements (Arbiola and Collanza and Montepescali) selected according to different socio-economic characteristics. In this respect, this study can be seen as a first step towards a more comprehensive analysis of the distribution of wealth in the Siennese countryside. The paper is structured as follows: first, I will discuss the socio-economic context of early fourteenth-century Siena (2), the main features of the source (3) and the dataset used (4). I will then present the results of my analyses for the city (5), and then for the countryside (6). The main results are discussed in the concluding remarks (7).

¹³ See my introduction to the volume and Alfani, "Epidemics."

2. Siena in the conjuncture of the early fourteenth century

Siena is an interesting example of the complex socio-economic transformations that late medieval societies underwent during the conjuncture of the early fourteenth century. Siena was – together with Pisa – the second most populous city in Tuscany after Florence, with around 50.000 inhabitants in 1300, and one of the most important financial centres in Europe in the second half of the thirteenth century.¹⁴ At that time, Sienese companies such as the Gran Tavola of the Buonsignori family preceded the Florentine banks and were extremely active in Flanders, Champagne and Rome.¹⁵ During the years 1280-1310, despite the successive bankruptcies of its banks – exacerbated by the conflict between loyalty to the imperial party and affairs with its main opponent, the papacy – Sienese society experienced what has been defined as an “economic paradox”.¹⁶ In fact, the decline in the number, budget and geographical scope of the Sienese banks, which had been at the heart of the previous economic growth and where most of the city’s wealth was invested and generated, did not correspond to an economic crisis, but rather to a profound transformation and reduction in the size of the financial sector. In fact, after the financial crisis, private wealth was increasingly invested in the public sector, i.e. in the city-commune.¹⁷ This was made possible by the new political regime of the so-called Nine Governors: they seized power in 1287 as representatives of the middle merchants, bankers and entrepreneurs interested in peace with the papacy and its allies.¹⁸ They set up a government of nine members, elected by a two-stage process – hence the name of the regime – from which the opponents of the imperial party and the lower and upper classes of Sienese urban society were excluded.¹⁹ The new rulers were also, in many cases, the lenders of the city-commune, ensuring the public funding as well as its repayment with high interest rates.²⁰

The Sienese oligarchy developed an ambitious programme of urban planning and patronage thanks to the huge influx of money collected through various kinds of loans, financing jobs in the building industry and promoting social consensus through art and architecture.²¹ Between 1290 and 1330, new walls and gates, a public palace, its bell tower and the Campo square were built, a new gigantic cathedral was planned and the Maestà by Duccio

¹⁴ Ginatempo, Sandri, *L'Italia*, 105-6, 149; Piccinni, “Il sistema senese.”

¹⁵ *Banchieri e mercanti*. For the major banking families: Chiaudano, “I Rothschild;” Carniani, *I Salimbeni*; Mucciarelli, *I Tolomei*; Mucciarelli, *Piccolomini*.

¹⁶ Piccinni, “Il sistema senese;” Piccinni, *Il ‘banco’ dell’ospedale*.

¹⁷ Piccinni “Il sistema senese.”

¹⁸ Piccinni, *Fedeltà*.

¹⁹ Bowsky, *A Medieval*, 23-84; Cherubini, “I mercanti,” 317-29; Raveggi, “Il governo.”

²⁰ Piccinni, *Operazione*, 31-7; Ginatempo, *Prima del debito*, 109-36; Fochesato, “Plagues, wars.”

²¹ Bowsky, *A Medieval*, 260-98; Piccinni, *Operazione*. See also the essays in Giordano, Piccinni, *Siena nello specchio*.

and Simone Martini were painted.²² The Commune also took over the city's social and health services and helped the Sienese wool merchants to improve the quality and quantity of their textile production by financing the facilities of their guild.²³ Public funds were also used to enlarge the territory of the city-state and to support the activities of Sienese merchants in southern Tuscany: in this way, Siena gradually acquired silver mines, salt pans, woods, pastures and cereal fields, while gaining new tax revenues.²⁴ However, this period was also marked by social and political unrest, as shown by the conspiracy of 1311, the rebellions of butchers, notaries, judges and magnates in 1318 and 1325, the uprisings of 1315 and 1329, those encouraged by the passage of the German emperors Henry VII and Charles IV in 1314 and 1355, which finally overthrew the regime of the Nine.²⁵

The peak of the Sienese economy, although in a state of flux, was probably reached in the first decades of the fourteenth century. In fact, only a positive demographic and economic trend could have allowed the regime of the Nine to foresee an increase in the population through new births and immigration. This is evidenced by the construction of a new neighbourhood named after Santa Maria in the district of San Martino (Figure 4A), which began in 1323.²⁶ Five years later, a demographic and economic change was already evident: the city council introduced benefits for the new settlers, as the district was not growing as fast as expected.²⁷ The contemporary chronicler Agnolo, son of Tura, claims that at that time the city was still "in great and proper condition, with many people and wealth": one can argue, however, that the Sienese economy was probably also slowing down, following the demographic trend.²⁸

3. *The source: the Tavola delle Possessioni (1316-20)*

In 1316, the Sienese government introduced a new tax system based on a standardized valuation of immovable property as a proxy for the fiscal capacity of each taxpayer. This reform was part of the Nine's programme of regime consolidation developed after the crisis that followed the passage of Emperor Henry VII and was made when the Sienese economy was still showing pos-

²² To the best of my knowledge, a comprehensive overview of this season of patronage is still lacking, but detailed references can be found in the works cited in the following footnotes. See also: Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena*, 103-12.

²³ Pellegrini, *La comunità*; Piccinni, "Il contesto politico-sociale;" Sordini, *Dentro l'antico ospedale*; Giacchetto, *Siena*.

²⁴ Redon, *L'espace*; Cristoferi, *Il «reame»*.

²⁵ Bowsky, *A Medieval*, 117-58; Costantini, *Carni*; Piccinni, *Operazione*, 31-7.

²⁶ Piccinni, *Nascita*, 73-140.

²⁷ Piccinni, 141-78; Piccinni, *Operazione*, 31-7.

²⁸ Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, *Cronaca*, 486-7. Translation by the author from the Italian vernacular.

itive signs.²⁹ Although the new tax system was originally called *estimo*, it is also known as the *Tavola delle Possessioni* (table of possessions), clarifying its nature as a cadastral survey.³⁰ In fact, it was based on a field survey carried out by dedicated officials to record and value all the land and buildings belonging to the inhabitants of the city-state, whether urban or rural, lay or clerical, noble or seigneurial. The immovables of religious and welfare institution, as well as of communities and guilds, were also assessed while landless were obviously not included.³¹

The compilation of the *Tavola delle Possessioni* took several years and was organized in two main phases. First, in 1317-8, the Sienese officials in charge of the survey assessed all the rural and urban properties, organized by fiscal district (*lira*) in the city of Siena and by community in the countryside. All the property records – listed in special registers called *Tavolette* – were then grouped together in an official series – the *Tavola* or *Estimo* – according to the owner's residence, in order to calculate the tax assessment of each taxpayer (1318). Finally, in 1320, the *Tavola* was revised and further amended by a special commission. The aim was to have a complete and up-to-date register of all the properties owned by Sienese taxpayers: for this reason, newly discovered or exchanged properties were additionally recorded until 1323-5, and sometimes until 1330. After 1325 the *Tavola* was largely abandoned: the size and speed of the real estate market, both in Siena and in the countryside, together with the resistance of the great Sienese landowners, have been cited to explain its disappearance.³²

The State Archive of Siena now holds 96 of the original 500 *Tavolette* registers and 51 of the original 59 *Tavola* registers for the city of Siena, together with 93 *Tavola* registers for the countryside.³³ The *Tavolette* registers provide a detailed overview of land and buildings in 158 rural communities of both the *Masse* (the rural territory within a 6-8 km radius of the city) and the *contado* (the rest of the rural territory subject to Siena): for each item, the owner's residence, the location, a brief description and, if rented, the lease system and the name of the tenant, the boundaries, the area and the value (calculated in account currency, that is *lire*, *soldi*, *denari*) are recorded.³⁴ These registers are particularly useful for reconstructing the use of land, the tenancy systems and the distribution of land ownership (including landowners living in Siena

²⁹ Before and after, the main source of tax revenue for the Commune of Siena was indirect taxation (tolls, etc.), together with the so-called *lira*, a tax system based on the taxpayer's self-declaration of all movable and immovable property: Bowsky, *The finance*, 89-97; Cherubini, "La 'Tavola delle Possessioni';" Cherubini "Proprietari," 231-41; Cammarosano, "Le campagne;" Farinelli, Giorgi, "Sources."

³⁰ For the *estimi*: Alfani, "Economic Inequality" and the Appendix.

³¹ Cherubini calculated that 50% of the households in the *Tavola* were without property; during the famine of 1302, a petition to the city council estimated that around 15,000 poor people in Siena were deprived of their alms: Cherubini, "Proprietari," 245-6.

³² Piccinini, *Operazione*, 33.

³³ State Archive of Siena (ASS), *Estimo*, Inventario, 15.

³⁴ For convenience we will report all values from the source and the database in *lire*.

or elsewhere) in each area. In most cases, however, information is only available for part of the territory of each community.³⁵

The *Tavola* registers, on the other hand, cover most of the landowners living in 295 rural communes, 125 seigneurial lords (*nobili*) living in the *contado*³⁶ and about 86% of those living in Siena, and thus all their properties: for each taxpayer they provide an updated list and a brief description (definition, location, boundaries, area and value) of each property, together with the total value of the assets assessed. In this respect, the *Tavola* registers allow us to analyze the distribution of wealth and economic inequality within and between Siena and its communities.³⁷ However, the loss of eight urban registers from this series is not without consequences, since they recorded, along with smaller taxpayers, one of the largest landowners of the entire city-state: the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala.³⁸ Moreover, it is likely that a separate register recorded all the properties of the commune of Siena in the city and in the *contado*, while those of the bishopric of Siena were hardly recorded in the lost records.³⁹ In fact, most of the properties of the Sienese bishoprics were concentrated in the seigneurial enclave of the so-called Vescovado of Murlo, where they escaped any tax assessment due to the autonomous jurisdiction.⁴⁰

4. The dataset

This study is based on two databases, both of which derive their information from the registers of the *Tavola* series. For Siena, I used the unpublished database developed by the *Tabula* project of the University of Siena, which covers all the city registers: for all the Sienese taxpayers recorded, it provides information such as name, surname or patronymic, gender, occupation (if declared), residence – specifying the *terzo* (=one of the three main districts of the city, see Figure 4A) and the *lira* (=the fiscal district) – and the total wealth assessed in 1318, that is, before the amendments of 1320-5.⁴¹ Despite

³⁵ ASS, *Estimo*, serie III, 145-239. Complete coverage is only available for a few communities such as Argiano, Camigliano, Castelnuovo dell'Abate, Castiglione d'Orcia, Radicondoli: Farinelli, Giorgi, *Camigliano, Argiano*; Farinelli, Giorgi, "La 'Tavola delle Possessioni'"; Farinelli, Giorgi, "Castellum"; Farinelli, Giorgi, "Radicondoli." See also: Farinelli, Giorgi, "Sources;" Cherubini "Proprietari," 263-89.

³⁶ ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 93; Cherubini "Proprietari," 292-5.

³⁷ ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 1-92 (for the countryside); serie II, 95-144 (for Siena). See also: Cherubini "Proprietari," 231-41.

³⁸ With regard to the hospital, Epstein, from the *Tavolette* series, valued the rural properties at a total value of 36.691 lire: Epstein, *Alle origini*, 40, table 1. This is only a partial reconstruction of the hospital's properties in the *contado* due to the gaps in the *Tavolette*, while the properties placed in Siena were not considered by Epstein: it is therefore likely that the total wealth of the hospital is 2-3 times higher.

³⁹ Pellegrini, "La 'Tavola ritrovata'."

⁴⁰ Mengozzi, *Il feudo*.

⁴¹ Pellegrini, Database progetto Tabula, based on ASS, serie II, 95-144. <https://www.dssbc.unisi.it/it/ricerca/progetti-di-ricerca/progetto-tabula>.

this invaluable wealth of information, the *Tabula* database is not without its problems: firstly, it does not allow a detailed analysis of the composition of the properties valued, i.e. the typology, location and value of each property. Secondly, the current *Tabula* database does not record the propertyless neither provides hints to estimate them. In this respect, estimates and assumptions based on primary and secondary sources have been made to calculate the potential impact of the propertyless on economic inequality.⁴² Thirdly, the *Tabula* database does not include the suburb of Monastero Sant'Eugenio (Figure 1), which, although located 3,5 km outside Siena, was one of the fiscal districts that made up the *terzo* of Città: in fact, its inhabitants enjoyed the same fiscal and political rights as those who lived within the city walls.⁴³ In this regard, the *Tavola* register of Monastero was included in this study and its data integrated in the database. Finally, by mirroring the information provided by the *Tavola* registers, the *Tabula* database also incorporates some of their structural problems (Table 1). By relevance:

- It records wealth per tax unit instead of wealth per household: in most cases the two match perfectly, but sometimes they do not. This is the case, for example, when a taxpayer is recorded twice as the sole owner and, separately, as co-owner of an inherited property with his siblings (0,8%).
- It does not provide the valuation of the assets if they are not calculated in the source or are simply lost (10,2%).
- It accounts for some taxpayers (4,8%) twice or three times, making it difficult to disentangle when someone is just a homonym or the same person.
- It includes non-urban categories of landowners, such as the seigneurs and the main religious institutions of the *contado* (3% of the total records).

Table 1. *DB Tabula project: records typologies to be fixed*

Typology	Issue	n.	%	Solution
External Categories	Institutions (city & <i>contado</i>)	53	0,9	Removing from the DB
	Seigneurial lords (<i>contado</i>)	125	2,0	Removing from the DB
Multiple names	Taxpayers recorded twice (in the same <i>lira</i>)	83	1,3	Considering the first assessment for the total wealth as valid
	Homonymous (in different <i>lire</i>)	218	3,5	Unifying the records and the wealth if proved as correspondents to the same taxpayer
	Taxpayers recorded also as co-owners	48	0,8	Keeping both records as separated fiscal units

⁴² Cherubini, "Proprietari," 231-41.

⁴³ Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, *Cronaca*, 487-8. The *Tavola* register of Monastero Sant'Eugenio was probably added to the series of the countryside centuries later, hence the gap in the *Tabula* database: ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 91.

Zero value	Lost records	415	6,7	Removing from the DB
	Properties recorded without valuation	14	0,2	Removing from the DB
	Total wealth not calculated	202	3,3	Calculating total wealth
	Total records in the DB	6.211		

Source: Pellegrini, *Database progetto Tabula*.

Table 1 shows these problems and the solutions I developed to make the *Tabula* database suitable for this study. Indeed, fiscal units were retained as the best available proxy for economic inequality at household level. The total number of records with problems was 1.158, representing 18,6% of the database (6.211 fiscal units). These records and their information were all checked against the digital version of the *Tavola* registers, and their problems were resolved according to specific procedures defined following previous studies on inequality.⁴⁴ As a result, 555 records were removed from the original database (DB), 164 records were made available for wealth estimation, 150 records of homonymous taxpayers were merged, while other 82 records of homonymous taxpayers were kept separate.⁴⁵ Then I added the records of 97 taxpayers assessed in the *lira* of Monastero Sant'Eugenio (ASS, *Estimo* 91): the wealth entered for each taxpayer of Monastero is the first one assessed (as in the original *Tabula* database), while the presence of new homonymous and co-ownership records within the *lira* and in the whole database was also checked and excluded. The religious, welfare and economic institutions located in the city and whose assets were valued (50) in the original *Tabula* database have been merged with those of Monastero (2) and kept separate from the fixed database: they are integrated only for carrying out specific analyses as indicated by the name of the database used (FDBI). The fixed database without institutions (FDB) contains 5.671 fiscal units for a total wealth of 5.944.613 *lire* and is currently the best available dataset for studying economic inequality in early fourteenth-century Siena (Table 4). It is also comparable to the other databases derived from the Florentine *estimi*, which also omit institutions and propertyless.⁴⁶

For the Siennese countryside, I entered new data from two *Tavola* registers for the sample areas of Arbiola and Collanza in Val d'Arbia and Montepescali in the Maremma (Figure 1).⁴⁷ The two sample areas represent different agro – and socio-economic systems, have different population sizes and were

⁴⁴ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends” and the Appendix online; Alfani, Di Tullio. *The Lion's Share*, Appendix.

⁴⁵ Homonymous records are the most critical problem to deal with: the total assets of two taxpayers with identical names were merged after a complete match of at least four of the following six fields: name, patronymic/husband's name, profession/provenance, *lira* of residence, *terzo* of residence, at least one rural property located in the same fiscal district.

⁴⁶ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1076-9, 1091-5 and the Appendix.

⁴⁷ ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 5 (Montepescali), 92 (Arbiola e Collanza).

also selected according to their distance from Siena and the proportion of land owned by Siennese residents.⁴⁸ Moreover, they have also been studied by Cherubini's research group, providing a counterevidence for our analyses.⁴⁹ Table 6 shows some statistics of this second database, which also includes religious, welfare and communal institutions: unlike in Siena, they are fully recorded for the sample areas. The data available for each taxpayer are the same as in Siena, the only difference being that the total wealth assessed is that up to the year 1320-5: the same date limit is also used to compare the two areas with the rural suburb of Monastero Sant'Eugenio.⁵⁰ As in Siena, the wealth cannot be disaggregated: however, this difficulty is less worrying since land was the main asset and house ownership was still common among the rural population of Siena at that time.⁵¹ In addition, for each of the sample areas, information was also collected on the properties owned by Siennese urban dwellers and by religious and welfare institutions located in the city. To do this, I used the *Tabula* database to identify the urban taxpayers who owned land and buildings there, and I entered their records from the corresponding *Tavola* registers of Siena: these data also go back to 1320-5.

5. *Wealth inequality in Siena (1316-8)*

This section explores the extent to which economic inequality was high in early fourteenth-century Siena, how it was exacerbated by the inclusion of the propertyless and by religious, welfare and guild institutions, how wealth was distributed and concentrated geographically, and who owned most of it. In 1316-8, economic inequality among Siennese landowners was extremely high, as indicated by a Gini index of 0,788.⁵² Such a high level of inequality was to be expected, as Cherubini's pioneering study of the *Tavola* had shown for a sample of the source: what is new here is its quantification with a standard indicator and a graphic representation for the whole population of Siennese landowners' (Figure 2) which allows further comparison at several levels.⁵³

The distribution of wealth by deciles confirms the remarkable concentration of property in the hands of a few people (Table 3). The tenth decile owns more than 68% of total wealth, the richest 5% more than 53% and the richest

⁴⁸ For the concept of social-agro system: Thoen, "Social agrosystems'."

⁴⁹ Mandriani, "Arbiola;" Cherubini "Proprietari," 278-89.

⁵⁰ The difference between the first and the following valuations may vary from case to case but is generally limited: for example, the total wealth of the Monastero Sant'Eugenio (including the institutions) was 40.443 *lire* in 1318 (with 99 landowners) and 43.781 in 1320-5 (with 93 landowners) while in Arbiola and Collanza (including the institutions) was 17.571 in 1318 and 17.863 in 1320-5, always with 49 landowners. Elaboration of the author from: ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 91 and 92.

⁵¹ Cherubini "Proprietari," 263-89.

⁵² Elaboration of the author from FDB.

⁵³ Cherubini "Proprietari," 241-52, based on 27 out of 59 *lire*.

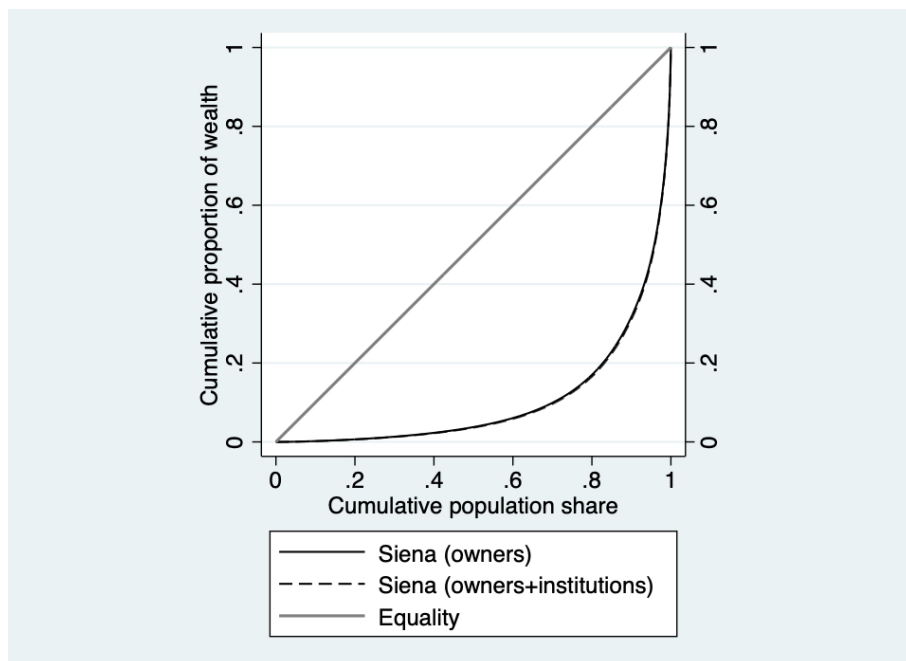


Figure 2. *Economic Inequality in Siena (1316-18): wealth distribution (Lorenz Curve)*

Note: Lorenz curves have been drawn using the *glcurve* Stata package.

Sources: FDB and FDBI.

1% almost 25%. The richest landowners belonged to the city's financial aristocracy (Table 2): among the richest 1%, the Salimbeni were the richest, with properties valued at over 140.000 lire. They were followed by other important banking families of the thirteenth century – Gallerani, Tolomei, Buonsignori, Piccolomini – publicly considered as magnates. Others belonged to the Nine's regime élite such as the Petroni, or repeatedly had their members elected as bishops of Siena such as the Malavolti.⁵⁴ This overlap is well known: in the sample studied by Cherubini, the households of Salimbeni, Gallerani, Tolomei and Buonsignori owned 20% of the total wealth.⁵⁵ The share of these families in the total wealth of Siena is actually 5% lower but this does not alter the conclusion that there is a strong correspondence between financial wealth (movable property) and landed property (immovable property). In fact, some of the richest Sienese households, such as the Buonsignori, began their financial activities by using their landed property as a guarantee.⁵⁶ In addition to their

⁵⁴ Mucciarelli, "Potere economico."

⁵⁵ Cherubini, "Proprietari," 247-52.

⁵⁶ Chiaudano, "I Rotschild;" Mucciarelli, *Piccolomini*, 73-210.

financial activities, these families acquired new properties, both urban and rural, in order to differentiate their investments and strengthen their capital base, as well as to increase and display their social prestige.⁵⁷ The Salimbeni and Tolomei families, who began to accumulate land and feudal rights in the second half of the thirteenth century, are a good example of this trend.⁵⁸

Table 2. *Composition of the top 1% in Siena: the 10 richest household groups (1316-8)*

	Name	Wealth (lire)	Fiscal units	
			n.	Mean (lire)
1	Salimbeni	140.944,3	5	28.188,9
2	Gallerani	124.986,5	4	31.246,6
3	Tolomei	114.511,0	6	19.085,2
4	Petroni	105.074,2	4	26.268,5
5	Buonsignori	88.983,1	3	29.661,0
6	Piccolomini	76.009,5	4	26.175,4
7	Franzesi	69.423,6	2	34.711,8
8	Malavolti	59.316,5	3	19.772,1
9	Ugurgeri	50.728,8	1	50.728,8
10	Arzocchi	43.467,8	1	43.467,8

Source: FDB=elaboration of the author from Pellegrini, *Database progetto Tabula* and from ASS, Estimo, serie II, 91 (Monastero Sant'Eugenio).

The *Tabula* database also provides a general assessment of the total wealth of these families in 1318, showing that the Tolomei were indeed the richest group of households in Siena with 402.679 *lire* (6,8% of the total wealth), followed by the Salimbeni (201.545; 3,4%), Piccolomini (174.747; 2,9%), Malavolti (146.474; 2,5%) and Gallerani (125.597; 2,1%).⁵⁹ These results do not always agree with previous analyses, since our database does not take into account the amendments of 1320 and the subsequent adjustments to the *Tavola*.⁶⁰ However, our evidence confirms the structure of the wealth of these families: the richest groups of households, such as the Tolomei or the Malavolti, were so because of their many family branches (72 and 30 fiscal units recorded respectively).⁶¹ Among them, however, the wealth was concentrated in a few households, while the 'poorest' branches owned smaller properties, mainly located in the city: for example, fourteen Tolomei households were recorded with a wealth of between 7,9 and 870 *lire*.⁶²

⁵⁷ Pinto, "I mercanti e la terra," 223-51.

⁵⁸ Carniani, *I Salimbeni*, 55-146; Mucciarelli, *I Tolomei*, 71-191, 307-39. See also the files: Ginatempo, "Salimbeni," Ginatempo "Tolomei."

⁵⁹ Elaboration of the author from FDB.

⁶⁰ For example, the total wealth of the Tolomei was calculated at 360.847 *lire*: Mucciarelli, *I Tolomei*, 307-9.

⁶¹ Elaboration of the author from FDB.

⁶² Elaboration of the author from FDB. See also: Mucciarelli, *I Tolomei*, 307-9.

Table 3. *Wealth distribution in Tuscan cities (1277-1325)*

	San Gimignano	Siena	Prato
Year	1277-90	1316-8	1325
Est. Pop.	7.637	52.000	10.559
Gini	0,712	0,788	0,703
D1	0,74	0,2	1,58
D2	0,76	0,44	1,82
D3	1,17	0,68	1,98
D4	1,51	0,98	2,14
D5	1,64	1,46	2,27
D6	2,66	2,29	2,49
D7	5,3	3,86	5,93
D8	10,06	7,09	6,69
D9	20,1	14,71	9,39
D10	56,05	68,29	65,72
Top 5%	38,29	53,78	55,26
Top 1%	16,74	24,99	29,18

Note: estimated population in Siena is from Ginatempo, Sandri, *L'Italia delle città*, 105-6; data on San Gimignano includes its *contado*.

Sources: *San Gimignano* and *Prato*: Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," 1093; *Siena*: FDB.

The overlap between the richest landowners and their financial activities is a non-trivial result for the study of economic inequality in the late Middle Ages for two reasons. First, because it further confirms a general equivalence between the levels of immovable and movable wealth, which could be extended to other medieval cities, especially for the study of the richest deciles. Secondly, and more importantly, because this equivalence allows, with some caveats, comparable analyses with the Tuscan *estimi*, based on the fiscal capacity of the taxpayers according to their total wealth, including movable property. In this respect, the distribution of wealth by decile of landowners in the cities of Siena, San Gimignano and Prato shows some differences worth discussing (Table 3).

A comparison of the Gini indices shows that wealth was even more unequally distributed in Siena (0,788) than in San Gimignano (0,712) and Prato (0,703). This means that Siena, on the one hand, has the lowest share of wealth owned by the deciles between the first and the seventh (0,20%-3,86%) and, on the other hand, as already mentioned, the highest share of wealth owned by the tenth decile (68,29%). More interestingly, the distribution in the top deciles was slightly different in the three cities, generating what is statistically defined as stochastic dominance, i.e. the dominance of the curve of one distribution over another, either completely (first-order) or partially (second-order) (Figure 3).⁶³ In San Gimignano, the eighth and ninth deciles have a higher

⁶³ Davidson, "Stochastic Dominance."

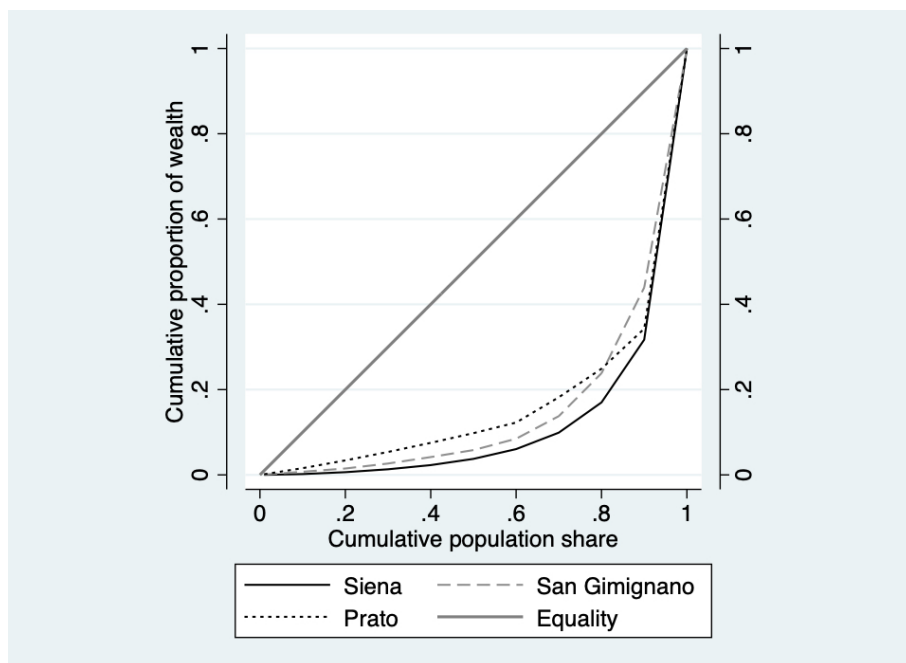


Figure 3. *Economic Inequality in Tuscan cities (1277-1325): wealth distribution (Lorenz Curve)*
 Note: Lorenz curves have been drawn using the *glcurve* Stata package.
 Sources: *San Gimignano* and *Prato*: Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-term trends,” 1093; *Siena*: FDB.

share of wealth (10% and 20% respectively) than in Siena and Prato. Conversely, in Prato the richest 5% and 1% have an even higher share (55% and 29% respectively) than in Siena. These differences could be explained by the economic structure of the three cities. San Gimignano, in the late thirteenth century, had a general prosperity characterized by the widespread presence of landed property in all social classes and especially in the middle and upper classes.⁶⁴ This could explain the good proportions of property owned by the eighth and ninth deciles, together with the fact that in the database the population of the city is grouped with that of the *contado*. In Prato, on the other hand, land ownership was probably less widespread (or less consistent) among the lower and middle deciles and concentrated among the richest 5% and 1%.⁶⁵

While the top of the distribution of wealth is reflected very well by the *Tavola*, it is much more difficult to get a clear picture of the bottom. The concentration of wealth is somewhat higher (0,042 points, i.e. a Gini index of 0,830) if we take into account the propertyless, assumed here to be equal to 25% of

⁶⁴ Fiumi, *Storia economica*, 127-48.

⁶⁵ Fiumi, *Demografia*, 35-83; Cherubini, “Ascesa,” 194-208, 218-28.

all fiscal units.⁶⁶ This implies a 5% increase in the Gini value when the poorest strata of the population are included: such a difference is not in line with that suggested by Sam Geens for Florence in the 1320s, which is equal to 10%, and by Alfani and Ammannati for Prato in 1372 and for Florence in 1427, which is around 20-23%.⁶⁷ In fact, all these results show that the difference between the Ginis in the distribution of wealth in Tuscany, with or without landowners, suggested by Alfani and Ammannati as equal to 20% in most cases, does not always hold: in Siena the distribution is different, as other evidence shows for later periods and areas.⁶⁸ How to explain this is another matter: it can be deduced, as already discussed above, that in early fourteenth-century Siena the distribution of wealth within the group of Sienese landowners was so unequal that the addition of more than 2.000 fiscal units without property had less impact than in other cases, such as early fourteenth – and early fifteenth-century Florence. In this respect, it is also necessary to take into account the different sensitivities of the source used to the statistical tools applied and the assumptions made. It is likely that an estimate such as the *Tavola*, based on immovable wealth – which is much more unequally distributed than movable wealth – is less sensitive to the addition of propertyless, confirming once again the complexity of excluding or including (often an assumed number of) zero value observations in the calculation of economic inequality.

With regard to the general distribution of wealth, its concentration among Sienese landowners hardly changes when we add the fifty religious, welfare and gild institutions located in the city, which were previously excluded from the FDB. Figure 2 shows that the Gini index for Siena increases only 1% (from 0,788 to 0,792).⁶⁹ On the one hand, the absence of the hospital of Santa Maria (together with the bishopric and the city-commune of Siena) among the registered landowners should be taken into account. On a smaller scale, for example, I observe a 29% increase in the Gini (from 0,565 to 0,806) if the abbey of Sant'Eugenio in Pelusina and the Monastery of Sant'Abbondio are added to the taxpayers in the *lira* of Monastero San'Eugenio, where they are located. In fact, the combined wealth of these institutions represents 49% of the total recorded in the *lira*.⁷⁰ A similar upsurge, however, is extremely unlikely for Siena: the total wealth owned by the recorded institutions is 347.262,5 *lire*,

⁶⁶ Sienese sources and previous literature agree that the most probable number of propertyless households in early fourteenth-century Siena was equal to 50% of the Sienese households assessed in the *Tavola delle Possessioni*: see footnote 31 above. Consequently, I reconstructed a fictitious wealth distribution by adding to the total number of urban taxpayers without a zero value (5.671) a number of observations with zero value equal to 1.418. For this method: Geens, "A Golden age," Appendix, 103-5.

⁶⁷ Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," 1094-5; Geens, "A Golden age," 265-7 and Appendix, 103-5. Geens calculates for Florence a Gini index of 0,743 in 1326 and infers an increase up to 0,828 by adding a number equal to 30% of all the taxpayers with zero value.

⁶⁸ Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-term trends," 1094-5: the authors notice an increase of c. 7% in Prato and Florence in 1450 and of 8,5-11% in rural and urban Piedmont between 1393 and 1613.

⁶⁹ Elaboration of the author from FDBI.

⁷⁰ Elaboration of the author from ASS, *Estimo*, serie I, 91.

equal to 5,5% of the total wealth. In any case, this is so unevenly distributed among the other landowners that the addition of a few more, mostly concentrated in the ninth and tenth deciles (35 out of 50), does not affect it.⁷¹ Even if we take the value of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala at 100-120.000 *lire*, the overall picture does not change very much, and the total wealth of the institutions remains below 10% of the total.⁷² This is the case, for example, if we also add to the group the wealth of the two institutions outside Siena, including the Cistercian abbey of San Galgano, the largest landowner recorded in the *Tavola* (128.635 *lire*): the total wealth of the institutions rises to 476.294 *lire*.⁷³ The situation could change if the wealth of the city-commune and the bishopric of Siena, which is unknown and will probably remain so, were also taken into account.

Table 4. *Economic Inequality in Siena (1316-8): Theil decomposition*

<i>District</i>	Camollia	Città	San Martino
<i>WGI</i>	1,500	1,369	1,437
<i>BGI</i>	0,018	-0,038	0,024
<i>Total WGI</i>	4,306 (99.9%)		
<i>Total BWI</i>	0,003 (0.1%)		
<i>Theil</i>	4,309		

Note: WGI=Inequality Within Groups; BGI=Inequality Between Groups.

Source: FDB.

As regards the geographical distribution of wealth, there are no consistent differences in the level of inequality between the three districts of the city: Camollia, Città and San Martino (Table 4). The contribution to inequality among districts, calculated using the Theil index, is insignificant (0,1%), while that within each district of the city, i.e. among its inhabitants, ranges from 1,369 in Città to 1,500 in Camollia.⁷⁴ This ranking almost reflects the distribution of the richest 1% of taxpayers between districts: 41% were resident in Camollia, 33% in Città and 26% in San Martino. Presumably, a smaller number of very rich taxpayers (29.682 *lire* in average) increased the concentration of wealth in San Martino, while a larger number of less rich members of the top 1% (23.498 *lire* in average) led to a less unequal distribution of wealth in Città.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Elaboration of the author from FDBI. This is the distribution of the wealth of the urban institutions per deciles: Q1 (1); Q3 (1); Q4 (4); Q5 (2); Q7 (2); Q8 (5); Q9 (8); Q10 (27).

⁷² See footnote 38 above.

⁷³ Elaboration of the author from FDBI. For San Galgano: Barlucchi, "Il patrimonio."

⁷⁴ The Theil index measures an entropic 'distance' the population is away from the 'ideal' egalitarian state of everyone having the same income. The numerical result is in terms of negative entropy so that a higher number indicates more order that is further away from the 'ideal' of maximum disorder. See: Cowell, *Measuring Inequality*, 53-61.

⁷⁵ Elaboration of the author from FDB.

Table 5. *Economic Inequality in Siena (1316-8): wealth distribution per lire*

Fiscal district	Archival record	Fiscal units	Wealth assessed ^a		Householders ^b
	ASS, <i>Estimo</i>	n.	Total	Mean	(1328)
CAMOLLIA					
Abbazia di San Donato di sopra	133	75	59.111,2	788,1	115
Abbazia di San Donato di sotto	134	134	22.362,2	167,9	413
Magione del Tempio	143	215	135.066,6	628,2	379
San Bartolomeo	144	80	36.787,5	459,8	154
San Cristoforo (a lato dei Provenzani)	128	74	77.690,0	1.049,9	263
San Cristoforo (a lato dei Tolomei)	130	59	383.704,8	6.503,5	71
San Cristoforo (a lato della chiesa)	129	59	266.293,5	4.513,4	68
San Donato (a lato dei Montanini)	131	153	150.638,6	984,6	320
San Donato (a lato della chiesa)	132	140	229.021,4	1.635,9	462
San Pietro a Ovile di sopra	126	51	91.066,6	1.785,6	107
San Pietro a Ovile di sotto	127	312	189.364,3	606,9	531
San Vincenzo	142	81	54.113,3	668,1	164
Sant'Andrea (a lato della chiesa)	138	78	153.050,1	1.962,2	140
Sant'Andrea (a lato della piazza)	139	81	70.031,7	864,6	151
Sant'Antonio	135	90	35.325,0	392,5	-
Sant'Egidio (a lato dei Malavolti)	136	137	152.337,6	1.112,0	277
Sant'Egidio (a lato dei Rustichetti)	137	85	28.321,7	333,2	214
Santo Stefano (a lato dei Benucci)	141	133	57.502,6	432,4	233
Santo Stefano (a lato della chiesa)	140	75	96.194,2	1.282,6	225
<i>Partial</i>	<i>19/19</i>	<i>2.111</i>	<i>2.287.946,8</i>	<i>1.083,8</i>	<i>4.287</i>
CITTÀ					
Aldobrandino del Mancino	100	52	77.070,6	1.482,1	100
Codennacci	-	-	-	-	86
Galgaria	96	80	401.268,1	5.015,9	87
Incontri	102	71	145.014,5	2.042,5	110
Manetti	101	69	74.997,1	1.086,9	124
Monastero (Sant'Eugenio)	91	97	18.351,2	189,2	148
Porta all'Arco	108	256	196.645,	768,1	346

Economic inequality in early fourteenth-century Siena and in its countryside

San Giacomo ai Canonici	99	84	101.236,0	1.205,2	150
San Marco	107	288	119.759,0	415,8	417
San Paolo	97	27	61.585,7	2.281,0	33
San Pellegrino	95	141	247.225,3	1.753,4	257
San Pietro di Castelvecchio	106	135	90.852,0	673,0	192
San Quirico di Castelvecchio	104	281	102.027,8	363,1	274
San Salvatore di sopra	-	-	-	-	198
San Salvatore di sotto	103	238	86.274,1	362,5	586
Sant'Agata	109	83	77.470,9	933,4	184
Stalloreggi di dentro	105	63	50.613,0	803,4	141
Stalloreggi di fuori	-	-	-	-	253
Vallepiatta di sopra	-	-	-	-	210
Vallepiatta di sotto	98	125	116.013,4	928,1	330
<i>Partial</i>	<i>16/20</i>	<i>2.090</i>	<i>1.966.403,7</i>	<i>940,9</i>	<i>4.226</i>
SAN MARTINO					
Abbadia Nuova di sopra	-	-	-	-	280
Abbadia Nuova di sotto	119	160	44.543,0	278,4	256
Cartagine	122	72	136.539,1	1.896,4	94
Malcucinato	115	26	23.726,6	912,6	32
Pantaneto	112	44	178.893,2	4.065,8	80
Porriane	114	36	149.276,3	4.146,6	57
Pozzo di San Martino	113	42	229.445,4	5.463,0	84
Rialto	121	87	96.452,1	1.108,6	141
Salicotto di sopra	123	94	71.604,9	761,8	224
Salicotto di sotto	124	94	50.139,6	533,4	144
San Giorgio	-	-	-	-	104
San Giusto	125	163	74.667,5	458,1	244
San Maurizio (al lato dei Pagliaresi)	117	76	31.788,6	418,3	123
San Maurizio (al lato della chiesa)	116	87	164.218,2	1.887,6	103
San Maurizio di fuori	-	-	-	-	346
San Pietro alle scale	-	-	-	-	46
San Vigilio di dentro	110	62	194.311,6	3.134,1	57
San Vigilio di fuori	111	101	109.285,2	1.082,0	170
Sant'Angelo a Montone e San Mamiliano	118	266	83.195,9	312,8	298
Spadaforte	120	60	52.139,2	869,0	103

<i>Partial</i>	17/20	1.470	1.690.226,6	1.149,8	2.986
TOTAL	52/59	5.671	5.944.613,0	1.447,1	11.499

Note: a=wealth values are expressed in *lire*; b=the number of householders assessed for the *lira* of 1328 is reported by Agnolo di Tura, *Cronaca senese*, 487-8.

Source: FDB.

In general, the rich and the poor were almost equally distributed among the three districts of the city. This homogeneity is also explained by the fact that each district almost perfectly represents one third of the urban area, including both the city centre and the most peripheral neighbourhoods, where medium and poor classes mainly lived (Figure 4A). In fact, if we look at the distribution of wealth per *lire*, we can clearly see a strong difference between the neighbourhoods by looking at the total and average wealth assessed (Table 5 and Figure 4B). The rich, despite spread in many *lire*, are clearly concentrated in the core commercial areas around the central square of the Campo (such as Pozzo di San Martino and San Paolo), along the Francigena route in Camollia (San Cristoforo) and San Martino (Porriene, Pantaneto), and along the main street in Città (Galgaria). There, the average wealth of the top ten *lire* ranges from 6.503 *lire* in San Cristoforo, near the houses of the Tolomei family, to around 1.962 *lire* near the church of Sant'Andrea, both in Camollia. Some of the poorest classes, on the other hand, were located on the outskirts of each district: for example, the average wealth of the ten lowest fiscal districts ranged from 416 *lire* in San Marco, near the south-eastern wall of the city (Città), to 162 *lire* near the Abbazia di San Donato, on the north-eastern side of Camollia. In this respect, Table 5 confirms the conclusions of the studies of Cherubini, Piccinni and Balestracci and completes previous overview by showing the average and total wealth for 52 out of 59 *lire*.⁷⁶

Figure 4B shows graphically what has been said above, but on a different basis. In fact, the territories of the *lire* are very difficult to draw: they are usually smaller than those of the *popoli*, i.e. the urban parishes, and they tend to extend over or to cut through more than one parish territory rather than overlapping. Sometimes, the boundaries of the *lire* are simply blurred or unclear. The information provided by the *Tabula* project makes it possible to associate each *lira* with the corresponding parish territory, whose boundaries are known. This allows us to reconstruct the geographical distribution of the members of the richest 1%, used here as a proxy of high average wealth, first in the 59 *lire* and then in the 37 *popoli*. The small number of observations for this proxy allows us to better control the conversion of data from fiscal to parish territories and allows us to plot the concentration of wealth in Siena at the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Cherubini "Proprietari," 241-52; Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena*, 113-44.

⁷⁷ Data from *lire* to *popoli* have been converted as follows: if the territory of a *lira* fully overlaps that of a *popolo*, the corresponding observations are simply added; if the territory of a *lira* is divided into *n* parishes, the corresponding observations have been divided according to the



Figure 4. *Urban districts (A) and wealth concentration per popoli (B) in Siena (1316-8)*

Note: Popoli: 1. San Bartolomeo di Camollia (=lira of San Bartolomeo); 2. Magione (=Magione); 3. San Vincenzo (=San Vincenzo); 4. Santo Stefano (=Santo Stefano ai Benucci; Santo Stefano alla chiesa); 5. Sant'Andrea (=Sant'Andrea alla piazza); 6. San Pietro a Ovile (=Porta Provenzani; Abbazia San Donato di sotto; San Pietro a Ovile di sopra; San Pietro a Ovile di sotto); 7. Abbazia San Michele in poggio San Donato (=Abbazia San Donato di sopra; Abbazia San Donato di sotto); 8. San Donato (=San Donato ai Montanini; San Donato alla chiesa); 9. Sant'Egidio (=Sant'Egidio ai Rustichetti; Sant'Egidio ai Malavolti); 10. Sant'Antonio (=Sant'Antonio); 11. San Pellegrino (=San Pellegrino; Aldobrandino del Mancino; Codennacci); 12. San Pietro alle scale (=San Pietro alle scale); 13. San Cristoforo (=Porta Provenzani; San Cristoforo ai Provenzani; San Cristoforo ai Tolomei; San Cristoforo alla chiesa); 14. San Vigilio (=San Vigilio di dentro; San Vigilio di fuori; Serravalle); 15. San Paolo (=San Paolo); 16. San Desiderio (=Codennacci; Galgaria; San Giacomo dei canonici); 17. San Giacomo (=Aldobrandino del Mancino); 18. Pieve di San Giovanni (Aldobrandino del Mancino; Codennacci; Galgaria; Incontri; Manetti; San Giacomo dei canonici; San Pietro in Castelvechio; Stalloreggi di dentro; Stalloreggi di fuori; Vallepiatta di sopra; Vallepiatta di sotto); 19. Santa Trinità del Laterino (=); 20. San Quirico in Castelvechio (=San Quirico in Castelvechio; Porta all'arco; San Marco; San Pietro in Castelvechio; Stalloreggi di dentro; Stalloreggi di fuori); 21. San Pietro in Castelvechio (=San Pietro in Castelvechio; Badia all'arco; Incontri; Porta all'arco; San Salvatore di sopra; San Salvatore di sotto); 22. San Salvatore (=San Salvatore di sopra; San Salvatore di sotto); 23. San Martino (Abbazia nuova di sopra; Abbazia nuova di sotto; Malcucinato; Pantaneto; Porrione; Pozzo di san Martino; Rialto; Salicotto di sopra; Salicotto di sotto; Spadaforte); 24. San Giorgio (=Abbazia nuova di sopra; Abbazia nuova di sotto); 25. Abbazia nuova (=Abbazia nuova di sopra; Abbazia nuova di sotto); 26. San Maurizio (=Abbazia nuova di sopra; Cartagine; San Maurizio di fuori; San Maurizio ai Pagliaresi; San Maurizio alla chiesa); 27. San Giusto (=Salicotto di sotto; San Giusto); 28. Borgo Santa Maria (=San Giusto); 29-30-31. Sant'Agata e Santa Mustiola (=Badia all'arco; Porta all'arco; Sant'Agata); 32. San Marco (=San Marco); 33. Castel Montone (=Castel Montone); 34. San Clemente (=San Maurizio di fuori); 35. San Leonardo (=); 36. Sant'Angelo a Montone (=San Maurizio di fuori); 37. Monastero Sant'Eugenio (=Monastero Sant'Eugenio).

Sources: Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena nel Trecento*, carta 1; FDB.

6. *Wealth inequality in the countryside of Siena: three samples (1320-5)*

This section looks at three sample areas to provide new statistically up-to-date measures of economic inequality for the countryside of Siena (Figure 1), and to discuss some of the potential causal factors of wealth concentration there, such as property distribution. As mentioned above, for the hamlets of Arbiola and Collanza and the rural commune of Montepescali, data from the *Tavola* registers – entered according to the amendments of 1320-5 – are used. The same operation was carried out for the records of Monastero Sant'Eugenio: although it belonged to the urban district of *Città*, it was located in the area of the *Masse* at 3,5 km from Siena and was surrounded by hilly cultivated fields, and thus halfway between a rural and an urban suburb. In 1320-5, 91 landowners were recorded with an assessed value of 17.646 *lire*, mostly land devoted to grain-cropping and vineyards, often mixed, and rural houses. Around half of these landowners were of modest affluence or even better off, owning between 100 and 800 *lire*. On the south-eastern edge of the *Masse*, about 8-10 km from Siena, are Arbiola and Collanza, two hamlets with a few rural houses and farms, grouped around the parish churches of San Pietro and San Giovanni and divided by the river Arbia. Together they had 47 inhabitants recorded as landowners in 1320-5, almost all of them peasants and sharecroppers of modest prosperity, with a total of 15.268 *lire* of immovable property. Most of this land was devoted to grain-cropping (about 57%) and, to a lesser extent, to mixed farming with cereals and vines (28%).⁷⁸ Finally, the fortified village of Montepescali was placed in the heart of the Maremma region – a vast and depopulated area 75 km south of Siena, characterized by woods, marshes and extensive cereal and livestock farming – on a hill at 200 m a.s.l.⁷⁹ The total wealth assessed is the highest of the three sample areas – over 29.000 *lire* – but is divided among more than 500 landowners, resulting in the lowest average value.

Montepescali is also as the most unequal of the three samples when only landowners are considered. The Gini index calculated is 0,681 while those for Arbiola and Collanza and Monastero are 0,609 and 0,565 respectively (Figure 5).⁸⁰ However, the difference in the distribution of the wealth among the population as a whole was probably smaller: the high number of small landowners recorded in Montepescali – 359 had assets valued at less than 50 *lire* – suggests that almost all the inhabitants were registered in the *Tavola*. This was probably not the case in Arbiola and Collanza and in Monastero Sant'Eugenio, where a higher proportion of (unregistered) propertyless working as urban and rural labourers and sharecroppers would be expected, sug-

number *n* of parishes. Then, for each parish, the observations (integral or divided) of all the *lire* corresponding to its territory are added.

⁷⁸ Mandriani, "Arbiola."

⁷⁹ Cherubini "Proprietari," 278-89.

⁸⁰ For the source of the results shown below see the references in Table 6.

gesting a more unequal distribution.⁸¹ The picture changes definitively when we include local institutions in the distribution: Monastero – where the abbey of Sant'Eugenio and the monastery of Sant'Abbondio together owned 49% of the total wealth – becomes the most unequal of the three samples with a Gini of 0,806. Conversely, the pattern of wealth concentration remains largely unchanged in Arbiola and Collanza (Gini index of 0,611) – where the two parish churches owned the 14% of the total wealth – and increases by 6% in Montepescali (Gini index of 0,732). In fact, the largest landowner was the commune of Montepescali, with almost 5.000 lire, or 13% of the total wealth.⁸² However, this property, mostly based on woods, pastures, marshes and arable land, was redistributed among the population in various ways as commons along the year, thus contributing to the integration of their incomes.⁸³ In this respect, communal assets served to reduce income inequality resulting from unequal land distribution and smallholdings: a feature which was clearly absent in the other two sample areas where commons and communal property probably disappeared early.⁸⁴ This function was in any case increasingly reduced during the fourteenth century by Siena, which took over some of the best resources in order to lease them in exchange for tax revenues.⁸⁵

Table 6. *Economic inequality in the Sienese countryside: wealth distribution in sample-areas (1320-5)*

Sample-area	Residents			Local institutions			Sienese owners and institutions		
	n.	lire	Mean	n.	lire	Mean	n.	lire	Mean
<i>Monastero Sant'Eugenio</i>	91	17.646,9	193,9	2	26.134,0	13.067,0	46	13.553,9	294,7
<i>Arbiola and Collanza</i>	47	15.268,2	324,8	2	2.594,9	1.297,4	31	8.801,9	283,9
<i>Montepescali</i>	505	29.487	58,3	5	6.978,1	1.395,6	2 ^a	265,8	132,9

Note: the term *Institutions* concerns here local welfare, religious and communal institutions; a=the Cistercian monastery of San Galgano nearby Chiusdino is accounted as a Sienese institution with 245,8 lire.

Sources: for residents and institutions: elaboration of the author from ASS, serie I, 5 (Montepescali), 91 (Monastero Sant'Eugenio), 92 (Arbiola and Collanza); for Sienese owners and institutions: elaboration of the author from ASS, serie II, 93, 95, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 113, 115, 116, 120, 125, 126, 127, 130, 131, 136, 144.

The distributions analyzed above concern only a part of the immovable property located in each sample area. In fact, apart from a few neighbouring rural landowners, the presence of Sienese urban dwellers and institutions as

⁸¹ Cherubini "Proprietari," 287.

⁸² Cherubini by looking at the *Tavolette* registers, which are uncomplete, accounted for a proportion of the wealth equal to 40%: Cherubini, 266, 280, 284.

⁸³ Imberciadori, *Statuti*; Cristoferi, *Il «reame»*, 93-107.

⁸⁴ Ginatempo, "Processi," Cherubini "Proprietari," 278-89.

⁸⁵ Cristoferi, *Il «reame»*, 101-7.

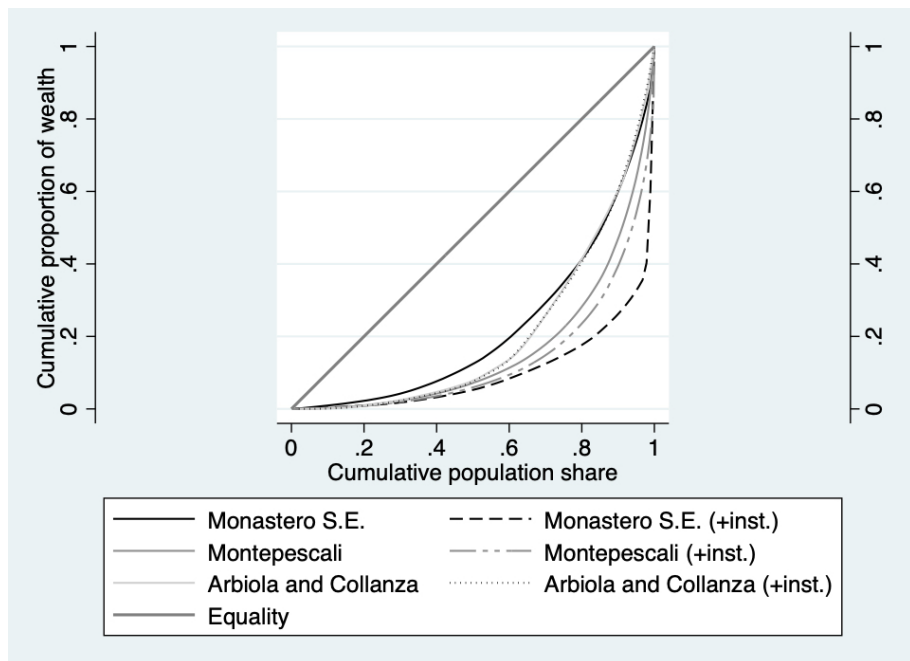


Figure 5. *Economic Inequality in the countryside of Siena (1320-5): wealth distribution (Lorenz Curve)*

Note: Lorenz curves have been drawn using the *glcurve* Stata package.

Sources: elaboration of the author from ASS, serie I, 5 (Montepescali); 91 (Monastero Sant'Eugenio); 92 (Arbiola and Collanza).

owners is fundamental to understanding the structure of wealth and its real concentration.⁸⁶ Indeed, the three samples also differ in terms of the share of the immovable property owned by Sienese landowners and institutions, as shown in Table 6. Monastero had the highest number of them, 46, who owned about 23% of the total wealth. In Arbiola and Collanza – and especially in the former, where the land was more fertile – Sienese urban dwellers owned about 1/3 of the immovable property recorded.⁸⁷ In Montepescali, on the other hand, only one Sienese notary, who owned 20 *lire*, and the abbey of San Galgano (245 *lire*) were recorded as external landowners.⁸⁸ The different levels of inequality measured among resident landowners should therefore be

⁸⁶ The properties registered in each *Tavola* register are usually, but not always, located in the taxpayer's area of residence; in addition, landowners living in neighbouring fiscal districts may also own properties there: Cherubini, "Proprietari, contadini," 278-89.

⁸⁷ Sienese landowners and institutions had assets valued 5,712 *lire* in Arbiola and 3,089 *lire* in Collanza. See also: Mandriani, "Arbiola."

⁸⁸ Cherubini "Proprietari," 280.

reassessed in the light of this evidence.⁸⁹ Indeed, in Monastero Sant'Eugenio, Arbiola and Collanza the economic inequality measured concerned the distribution of 30% and 57% of total wealth respectively, while in Montepescali it was 80%. All the rest belonged to local and Sienese institutions and urban dwellers, as a result of an ongoing and well-known process of land consolidation.⁹⁰ Moreover, as in other areas of late medieval Tuscany, the property of urban dwellers tended to be located on the best and most fertile land, i.e. the most productive, exacerbating the consequences of wealth inequality on the distribution of income.⁹¹

However, there was also a form of partial redistribution, albeit extremely extractive, to mitigate the consequences of the unequal access to land created by urban and religious property in central Tuscany: the so-called *mezzadria* (sharecropping).⁹² By dividing the input and output of the leased land in half between the landlord and the sharecropper, this contract acted as an institution to regulate inequality, giving the lower classes of the rural population access to the income from the land and allowing smallholders to integrate their income.⁹³ Together, the *mezzadria* insured absentee urban landlords against moral hazard and overexploitation, thus protecting their land investments.⁹⁴ At the beginning of the fourteenth century, sharecropping was not yet fully developed: at the same time, due to the increasing urban-driven land purchase and the high demographic pressure, *mezzadria* contracts were particularly extractive, requiring a high contribution from the sharecroppers in terms of oxen, seeds and other inputs.⁹⁵ In this respect, it is not surprising to find even in an area characterized by direct farmers such as Arbiola and Collanza that over 90% of the land of local institutions and Sienese urban dwellers was leased out in *mezzadria*.⁹⁶

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has presented the first statistically up-to-date analysis of economic inequality in early fourteenth-century Siena and in its countryside. This has been possible thanks to the extraordinary wealth of information contained in the *Tavola delle Possessioni*, the earliest and most complete fiscal cadaster for an Italian medieval city, covering all the landowners in Siena and in almost three hundred settlements. It has been possible to exploit the wealth of information contained in this remarkable source by carrying out

⁸⁹ Cristoferi, "Socio-economic."

⁹⁰ Ginatempo, "Processi."

⁹¹ Herlihy, Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans*, 93-109.

⁹² See Cristoferi, "Socio-economic" and the bibliography.

⁹³ Cristoferi; Herlihy, Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans*, 106-9.

⁹⁴ Ackerberg, Botticini. "The Choice."

⁹⁵ Ginatempo, "Processi;" Pinto, "I mercanti e la terra;" Pinto, Pirillo, "Il contratto."

⁹⁶ Mandriani, "Arbiola," 90; Cherubini "Proprietari," 297-301.

synchronic, rather than diachronic, analyses of the distribution of wealth, focusing on levels of inequality and comparisons between sample areas. A thorough work of revision, adaptation and integration of the *Tabula* project database with the digital version of the *Tavola* registers and the new data entry for three rural settlements has allowed us to create a complete and reliable dataset for further research on Siena and to establish data entry and analysis procedures to extend our analysis in the countryside in the future.

The study of the distribution of wealth in Siena has provided a measure of economic inequality before the Black Death for one of the major Italian cities of the late Middle Ages, when its economy was still showing positive signs after the political and economic transformation that took place between the end of the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth. These results were also compared with those available for Prato and San Gimignano: to date, Siena has the highest level of economic inequality in Tuscany before 1348 (Gini index 0,788). Moreover, the inclusion of the landless and the institutions did not significantly affect the already high concentration of wealth recorded in Siena in 1318 (1% and 5% respectively), unlike in other cases. The distribution of immovable property was also analyzed in detail at both the geographical and the household level: most of our findings are consistent with those of previous studies, in particular Cherubini's first analysis of the *Tavola*, while providing new evidence based on the closest reconstruction of the entire population of Siennese landowners.

In this respect, it would be interesting for the future to link the evidence found on economic inequality with the internal dynamics of social mobility in early fourteenth-century Siennese society, which has already been traced for some specific social and professional categories.⁹⁷ The data on the professions of Siennese taxpayers have not been analyzed here due to the limitations of the datasets used: however, further cross-referencing with other contemporary sources, such as notarial registers and the lists of representatives elected to Siennese offices and magistracies, would provide a better understanding of another fundamental and intertwined dynamic with the concentration of wealth, as demonstrated elsewhere in this volume.⁹⁸

The study of the Siennese countryside, on the other hand, has a preliminary character: it has provided new measures of economic inequality for three sample areas with different agricultural and socio-economic characteristics, such as the presence, typology and share of immovable property owned by institutions and Siennese landowners. In this respect, our results suggest that any statistical measure of economic inequality should be carefully con-

⁹⁷ See, for instance: Mucciarelli, "Potere economico," Piccinni, *Fedeltà*; Costantini, *Carni*; Giacchetto, *Siena*.

⁹⁸ For an example of a combined study of social mobility and economic inequality see the chapter of Poloni in this volume. See also: Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social mobility*. An unpublished list of representatives elected during the regime of the Nine was made by Sergio Raveggi and Alessia Zombardo at the University of Siena in the 2000s.

textualized in the light of the overall distribution of wealth. For example, high levels of inequality between residents could correspond to contexts where the lion's share of the immovable property belongs to urban dwellers, or where specific mechanisms of access, redistribution and extraction of land, such as commons or sharecropping, were in place, exacerbating the difference between formal and informal access to and income from landed property. In this respect, a comprehensive study of wealth inequality in a broader selection of the settlements covered by the *Tavola* – in connection with the *Tabula* database for the city – could provide sufficient data and case studies to develop a robust interpretive framework for statistical measures and to test the influence of processes such as land consolidation and proletarianization on rural economic inequality.

To conclude, our results also have implications for the debate on the causes of late medieval economic inequality, as mentioned in the introduction. The case of Siena, especially when compared with Prato and San Gimignano, could support an interpretation of wealth concentration based on both the specific economic and financial context of the city and its demographic size. Indeed, the most populous city has the greatest economic inequality: however, this is not entirely true, as shown by the small increase in inequality that occurs when we include the propertyless. In fact, it seems that the strong connection between financial activity and property ownership among the richest 1% and 5% is better able to explain the high economic inequality found in Siena at the beginning of the fourteenth century. This is also supported by the comparison of the distribution of deciles and the economy with San Gimignano and Prato. Both explanations are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, and lead us to reconsider the combination of more than one factor to uncover the mechanism behind wealth concentration.⁹⁹ The same is true if we look at factors such as demography, proximity to the city and property distribution for rural areas. In fact, the first factor seems to explain the Ginis found (higher in Montepescali, lower in the other settlements) if we consider only the inhabitants, while proximity to the city better explains the presence of Sienese urban dwellers and institutions as landowners and, consequently, a more unequal distribution of wealth. Finally, it is worth noting that such a high level of economic inequality was recorded in Siena at a time when its economy was undergoing profound changes but still showing positive signs. In this respect, it could be argued – but not yet proven – that it is the first part of a Kuznets curve, based on about a century of economic and demographic growth in Siena, which then entered the conjuncture of the fourteenth century, keeping inequality high instead of reducing it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Alfani, "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial," 19-30.

¹⁰⁰ van Zanden, "Tracing;" Alfani, "Epidemics," 11-6.

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Economic inequalities in an Iberian urban society: Tortosa before and after the Black Death

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La città di Tortosa era uno dei centri più importanti della Catalogna nel tardo Medioevo, grazie soprattutto al suo porto fluviale che connetteva l'interno della penisola iberica con le reti commercio del Mediterraneo. Negli archivi della città si conservano diversi registri fiscali, chiamati *manifests* che stimavano la ricchezza di ciascun contribuente cittadino per redistribuire l'importo della tassazione diretta. Il saggio prende in esame gli unici due *manifests* completi conservati, rispettivamente del 1316 e del 1353: il loro studio combinato permette di osservare l'impatto della Peste Nera sulla popolazione e la ricchezza della città. In primo luogo, il saggio descrive il contesto socio-economico e la struttura urbana di Tortosa nel Trecento e le principali caratteristiche delle fonti prese in esame. Segue l'analisi della struttura demografica e della concentrazione della ricchezza nonché della loro evoluzione fra 1316 e 1353. Infine, si propongono alcune considerazioni sull'impatto della peste del 1348 sulle disuguaglianze economiche e la struttura demografica della città di Tortosa.

The city of Tortosa was one of the most important urban centres in late medieval Catalonia, mainly thanks to its river port, which linked the Iberian interior to the Mediterranean trade networks. In the archives of Tortosa there are several registers of wealth, called *manifests*, which served as the basis for the distribution of direct taxes according to the wealth of each taxpayer. This paper examines the only two *manifests* that are complete, those of 1316 and 1353: together they allow us to study the impact of the Black Death on population and wealth. The paper first describes the socio-economic and urban structure of the city in the fourteenth century and then the main features of the sources used. Secondly, it examines the structure and evolution of the distribution of population and wealth between 1316 and 1353. Finally, we propose some reflections on the impact of the plague of 1348 on both economic inequality and the demographic structure of the city of Tortosa.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Tortosa, registri fiscali, disuguaglianze economiche, Peste Nera.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Tortosa, fiscal registers, economic inequality, Black Death.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade,¹ the study of economic inequality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period has gained a great deal of momentum, in Europe as a whole and in the Iberian Peninsula in particular. The case of Catalonia has been no exception, as shown by the many studies that have been published on this subject in recent years.² Therefore, the objective of this study is to contribute to this line of research through an investigation focused on the city of Tortosa, in the south of Catalonia, between the 1310s and the 1350s.

This study will be conducted mainly through the analysis of two fiscal sources, known as *manifests*, the analysis of which already has a long history in research work similar to this. Thus, the fundamental goal of the present article is to take a close look at the people of Tortosa and their wealth at two specific moments in time, the years 1316 and 1353, in order to, firstly, estimate their levels of inequality and then to see if these increased or decreased over the almost four decades between both years. Ultimately, an attempt will be made to perceive what the effects of the Black Death were in Tortosa, on a demographic level and above all with regard to the distribution of wealth among the population that survived the onslaught of the epidemic, and if it was different for men and women. This will be done along the lines of recent studies on the subject, in order to assess whether or not Tortosa experienced a reduction in inequality after the Black Death, as has been documented in some European cities and villages.³

To do this, we shall first present the city of Tortosa in the fourteenth century and then the sources used. Secondly, we shall offer a panoramic overview of the results obtained, focusing on the demographics, on the analysis of economic inequality and on the main taxpayers in Tortosa. Lastly, we shall offer some brief conclusions to try to answer the questions posed throughout the text.

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² So as not to prolong this section unnecessarily, we refer to the bibliography cited in Miquel, Verdés, "Contribución al estudio."

³ See Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality," and the bibliography.

2. The city and its context

2.1 Tortosa in the fourteenth century

In line with the upward trend of the period, Tortosa became an economic centre of the first order in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴ In fact, together with Tarragona and Lleida, it was one of the main cities in *Catalunya Nova*, the name given to the territories conquered from the Muslims during the twelfth century. On the left bank of the river Ebre, the city stood at an important communications intersection, by river, land and sea. Numerous types of merchandise from Aragon and the interior of the Peninsula were sent to different points on the Mediterranean, making Tortosa's harbour on the river an obligatory port of call. The whole adjacent sector formed the *Alfòndec*, the commercial quarter par excellence of medieval Tortosa, where the exchange (*llojja*) was built as a contracting centre and a goods warehouse.⁵

The city had a multi-ethnic population. Apart from the Jews who lived in the old and new *call* (Jewish quarter) and the Muslims who were forced to live in a suburb beneath the old Moorish fortress (La Suda), the population of Tortosa was mostly Christian. After the conquest of 1148, the city experienced continual demographic growth since it benefitted from a large number of migrants from other parts of Catalonia, and also from Aragon and other more distant places.

In a period still some years away from the appearance of hearth taxes, which were introduced after the Black Death, it is difficult to know how big the city's population was during the period of growth.⁶ Hearth taxes, however, are not the only fiscal registers we have available for quantifying the population, since demographic information, as or more valuable, can also be extracted from the *manifests*, as will be seen later. Either way, the increase in the population is reflected in the city's urban growth and, specifically, in the creation of new districts, or *eixamples*, above all in the eastward expansion towards the place where the convent of Santa Clara was established.⁷ Between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the city appears divided into four parishes: Santa Maria, centred around the cathedral, must have cor-

⁴ For the case of Tortosa: Curto, Vidal, "La ciutat de Tortosa," 68-71; Alanyà, *Els jueus de Tortosa*, 39-40, part I; Bonet, "La ciutat i els poders locals." For a more general urban context, see: Sabaté, "Ciudad e identidad," Morelló, "Un nou actor polític."

⁵ Although a royal permission was granted already in 1352, the construction of the building seems to have begun in 1368: Vidal, *Les obres de la ciutat*, 252-3. As Albert Curto said, this exchange building became the most tangible commercial symbol of the municipal oligarchy: Curto, *La intervenció municipal*, 67.

⁶ We do not include some figures postulated by Miravall, *Episcopologi*, 166, as they are not very reliable.

⁷ From the thirteenth century onwards, many convents began to appear in Tortosa, ascribed to different religious orders, apart from the houses belonging to the military orders. All this demonstrates the degree of attraction exerted by the city thanks to the level of development it had attained.



Figure 1. *The city of Tortosa in the fourteenth century*
Source: elaboration of the authors.

responded to the early Islamic medina; Santa Clara and Sant Jaume, to the Islamic suburbs that surrounded it, and the *Alfòndec*, to the city's southern extension.⁸

The fourteenth-century city was by then an urbanistic reality, more or less transformed with respect to the old Muslim *taifa* capital. A large part of the city stood within the old Andalusian walls, while other sectors remained outside them.⁹ In fact, the period we are studying here is prior to the new walled perimeter, on which building work began in 1365.¹⁰

With regard to the jurisdictional situation in the fourteenth century, it is useful to bear in mind some changes that correspond to the period dealt with here. In 1294, as a result of the exchanges (*permutes*) conducted by the monarchy with the principal lords who possessed jurisdictional rights in the

⁸ According to Muñoz, "La demografía," 3. In the period, reference is also made to the parish of Gènova, which spread beneath La Suda, as the prolongation of Santa Maria.

⁹ According to Vidal, *Les obres de la ciutat*, 130, over the centuries various enclosures existed, but reconstructing the history of the walls before 1300 is problematic.

¹⁰ Between 1347 and 1351, coinciding with the war of the unions – a long-lasting conflict between the king and the nobility of Aragon and Valencia – there was a first attempt to enclose the city inside a new perimeter: Vidal, *Les obres de la ciutat*, 134.

urban area – the Knights Templar and the nobleman Guillem de Montcada¹¹ – Tortosa was consolidated as a royal city and the capital of a district or *vegueria*. It stayed that way in the first decades of the fourteenth century, until King Alfons IV the Kind transferred it to his son Ferran. The latter acted as the “marquis of the city” from 1329 to 1363, after which the city returned to direct royal control.

The entire phase of demographic, urbanistic and economic expansion and growth came to a sudden halt in the middle of the fourteenth century with the appearance of the Black Death. The situation in Tortosa is wholly comparable with what happened all over Europe. It is thought that the bubonic plague initially had a serious impact on the city, but apart from the information provided by some authors from time to time, the subject has not been studied in depth. Even so, for the detailed study that we shall make below of the socio-economic reality of the people of Tortosa, it is useful to bear in mind what the situation could have been like, created as a result of the arrival of the Black Death and its possible effects.

2.2 The sudden appearance of the Black Death and its impact

The city’s enviable geographical location on the banks of the river Ebre made it completely impossible to avoid the waves of contagion of the disease and, like everywhere else in the country, this came to Tortosa by sea.¹² The first news appears at the end of May 1348.¹³ It was about the sick or dead people who were in the ships at the mouth of the river. Because of that, they were prevented from continuing to sail upstream and trading with the cloths or other merchandise from these ships.¹⁴ Despite everything, the epidemic eventually spread all over the city. On 1 June there was talk of asking Pope Clement VI in Avignon for a temporary absolution of sin for all the people who were dying, and at the same time they were starting to discuss a possible enlargement of the cemetery of Sant Joan, on the edge of the city.¹⁵

Continuing with the examination of the minutes of the Council of 1348, other indicators of the seriousness of the situation soon appeared. It was

¹¹ This year, the provincial master of the Order in Aragon and Catalonia signed an exchange by which he ceded the Templars’ control over the city and territory of Tortosa to James II. Guillem de Montcada, in turn, ceded to the same king all the dominion and other rights that he had in the city, as well as the castle of Paüls, in exchange for other domains: Pagarolas, “Permuta de 1294,” 272 and 274.

¹² As pointed out in Benedictow’s monumental work on the Black Death, its spread followed the main commercial and transportation routes of the time: Benedictow, *The Complete History*, 203.

¹³ The first reports of the Black Death in Catalonia date from the end of March and beginning of April 1348 in Perpignan: Maltas, *Caresties, fams*, 291.

¹⁴ Arxiu Comarcal del Baix Ebre (ACBE), *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 3, f. 167r, 1345-8.

¹⁵ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 3, f. 168v, 1345-8. For this reason, the municipality purchased an adjacent orchard: Vidal, *Les obres de la ciutat*, 334.

declared that of the sixty councillors on the city's corresponding deliberative body, only eighteen were still alive.¹⁶ The solution adopted was to add a complementary number to it, so that the body would still contain at least forty councillors, which was justified in the following way: *com per les dites malalties e mortaldats no es pot tenir consell de seixanta per les poques gentes que hic són romases, car atrobats que les dues parts de les gentes de la dita ciutat e pus són morts* (since due to the said illnesses and deaths a council of sixty is impossible because of the few people remaining, as it has been seen that two-thirds of the people of the said city, or more, are dead).¹⁷ Whether exaggerated or not, this declaration gives us an idea that the plague had a serious impact on the population of Tortosa, very much like what has been recorded elsewhere.¹⁸ In reference to the new councillors elected in 1350, we can confirm that the number of forty councillors was maintained, while reminding people that there had been more before.¹⁹ It was admitted that *no es pot fer altrament per les poques gentes que hic són romases de les mortaldats ençà* (we cannot do otherwise due to the few people who are still alive).²⁰

Apart from the unquestionable impact on the population, an indirect consequence of the Plague was the rise in salaries, at least after 1349. Different tradesmen, such as the shoemakers and blacksmiths, who were joined by the farm labourers (*bracers*), began charging higher prices for their products or demanding higher rents and salaries in exchange for their work.²¹ Faced with that, the Council of Tortosa, the genuine representative of the interests of the local oligarchy, issued various ordinances aimed at limiting these increases. The situation was widespread enough to make it necessary for a general edict to be enacted in July of that year, by virtue of which King Peter the Ceremo-

¹⁶ As well as the deaths of the two attorneys and other people who held different municipal posts, as Curto noted, *La intervenció municipal*, 213. Forty-two deaths out of sixty is a very huge rate in comparison, for example, with the impact of plague on the political representatives in Girona, where it is said that twenty-seven of the eighty members of the Council died: Guilleré, *Girona al segle XIV*, 180.

¹⁷ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 4, f. 2r, 1348-50.

¹⁸ Traditionally, it has been assumed that the impact of the Black Death was far greater in larger cities than in small towns due to the population density, which facilitated contagion. However, it appears that, in fact, "according to a defining feature of bubonic plague, [...] mortality is highest in (small) villages, according to the principle of the inverse relationship between mortality and population density": Benedictow, *The Complete History*, 229. This pattern also seems to apply to Catalonia, where Maltas estimates that the urban mortality rates ranged between 15% and 30%, about a quarter of the urban population: Maltas, *Caresties, fams*, 299-300. In general, it was impossible to gauge the real impact of the Plague, apart from some indirect indicators, as seen in the case of Manresa (Mas, "Epidèmies i crisis") and in a broader analysis by Maltas ("Mesurar la mortalitat," 67-83). In Vic, the plague is believed to have been responsible for the deaths of between a quarter and a third of the population: Puigferrat, "Pesta i crisis," 48-9.

¹⁹ Likewise, the years 1355-6: ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 6, ff. 23r, 91v, 1355-6.

²⁰ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 4, f. 100v, 1348-50. Reviewing, however, the Council minutes of those years, we see that the number of councillors attending meetings continued to fluctuate greatly.

²¹ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 4, ff. 20v-21r, 23v, 1348-50.

nious ordered everyone in the Principality of Catalonia to moderate salaries and prices.²²

A paradigmatic example of the scarcity of manual labour after 1348 is to be found in the construction of the new cathedral of Tortosa, the foundation stone of which had been laid in 1347 at the behest of Bishop Bernat Oliver, who would later succumb to the plague. According to Victòria Almuni, the economic and demographic crisis caused by the Black Death was one of the main causes of the slowdown in the work on the cathedral building.²³ At the same time, the council's tax collection suffered from the sudden loss of population: a direct tax established in 1350 had to be farmed at a reduced price due to the losses occasioned by the deaths.²⁴ The collection of indirect taxes must also have felt this, although we do not have sufficiently valid data to corroborate this.

As is known, there were further outbreaks of plague in the 1360s.²⁵ In 1353, however, the situation might possibly have improved substantially, and a period of recovery could have begun. The preparation of a new book of *manifests* in order to continue collecting the traditional direct taxes might be an indicator of a certain degree of normality having been reached.

3. *The sources*

3.1 *The books of manifests*

In Catalonia, the *manifests*, estimations or valuations, equivalent to the registers of wealth in other parts of Europe, served as a basis for the distribution of the direct taxes proportional to wealth, the *talles*.²⁶ To find the earliest surviving examples of this type of fiscal source, it is necessary to wait until the second half of the fourteenth century, if not later, as there are hardly any registers earlier than 1350.²⁷ Specifically, Tortosa stands out for having quite a long series of *manifests* in the fourteenth century, between 1316 and 1353.

²² This edict was thus enacted, due to the rising prices and salaries that artisans had introduced, as much as four to five times higher. As well as mentioning different occupations, farm labourers and all other kinds of salaried workers were also included: Abadal, *Pere el Cerimoniós*, 47-9. This author was however doubtful of the effectiveness of this edict. On the rise in wages after the Black Death, see: Cohn, "The Black Death."

²³ Almuni, *La catedral de Tortosa*, 85.

²⁴ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Provisions, 4, f. 81v, 1348-50.

²⁵ See, for example, Günzberg, "Epidemias y mortalidad," who includes data from Tortosa in his study.

²⁶ Turull, Morelló, "Estructura y tipología," 271-326; Furió, "Avant le cadastre," 200-31.

²⁷ In Cervera, the first surviving example of the series is from 1340, like another book of estimates from Granyena de Segarra, a locality not too far from Cervera. The second in the Cervera series dates from 1352 and continues with five more examples from the late fourteenth century. For the remaining chronologies of the examples conserved in Catalonia, see Morelló *et al.*, "A study of economic inequality," 276-9.

All of them are, along with some *talla* registers, in the municipal collection of the Baix Ebre *Comarcal* Archive, except for one volume kept in the Cathedral Archive dating from 1316.²⁸ This would therefore be the first one in the series, if we rule out other, more imprecisely dated, registers. To conduct this analysis, we shall use the two that are complete: the one from 1316 and the one from 1353.²⁹

All these *manifests* are associated with the collection of the *comuns*, the term used most often in Tortosa to refer to direct taxation.³⁰ The *Costums*, a famous legal compendium drafted at the end of the thirteenth century, show how often direct taxes must have been levied on the people of Tortosa. Thus, in heading I (the one entitled *De l'ordenament de la Ciutat de Tortosa*, especially points 1.1.18 and 1.1.21), various regulations are included referring to the collection of the *comuns*.³¹ Among other things, it was laid down that *totz los ciutadans e'ls habitants de Tortosa e de son termen* (all the citizens and inhabitants of Tortosa and of its territory) had to contribute, based on everything they had *seent e movent per sou e per liura sens tot contradiment* (immovable and movable by *sou* and *lliura* without any contradiction). We find the distinction between movable and immovable assets indicated systematically in the books of *manifests* of Tortosa, and the way of applying the principle of *per sou e per liura* is also made clear in them because they are hybrid registers, in which both the valuations of assets and the resulting tax payment quotas appear.

Apart from the citizens and inhabitants of the territory, there were other groups subject to these *talles*. The knights would pay for the immovable assets acquired from others or for other properties they had in the city and territory, except for the *cavalleries* that they had originally possessed.³² The Jews and Muslims were also obliged to pay the tax for all the immovable goods they had in Tortosa and in its territory, including those purchased from Christians. In the case of the poor people, they were made to pay according to what was considered appropriate. They were therefore excluded from the principle of proportionality that was applied to all the other taxpayers.

It seems beyond doubt that, already by the end of the thirteenth century, registers of assets were being created with a view to collecting the *comuns*, even though none from that period has survived.³³ All in all it allows us to

²⁸ Arxiu Capitular de Tortosa (ACT), *Manifest de 1316*; the book has been recently re-discovered and has not been inventoried yet. Before, it was partially transcribed by the Barcelona historian Francesc Carreras Candi: Carreras, *L'aljama de juheus*, 123-50.

²⁹ ACT, *Manifest de 1316*; ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 21, 1353. The first has recently been the subject of a comprehensive study by Morelló, *Població i riquesa a Tortosa*.

³⁰ From a legal point of view, see Montagut, "La doctrina medieval."

³¹ We follow the latest edition of the normative text produced by Massip, *Costums de Tortosa*.

³² Namely, in allusion to the lots of land that they had received originally from their feudal lords, and with the incomes from which it was hoped they could fund the corresponding military service.

³³ Obviously, in other Catalan cities similar fiscal systems had already been introduced, as we know from Cervera and Manresa. This last city took as its model what was being done in Barce-

glimpse to what extent a quite regular form of direct taxation had been introduced to cover municipal expenditure that is not explicitly stated in these registers.³⁴ As we said earlier, for the present study we are only taking into account the registers of 1316 and 1353, the reason why it is worth commenting on some of their differential aspects.

3.2 *Characterization of the two chosen manifests*

The *manifest* of 1316 includes global valuations according to two types of assets, immovable (*seti*) and movable, although there are quite a few taxpayers who only have immovable valued. In those who declare both types, the sum of the two different valuations is not noted down. In many cases, nothing is indicated, so only the name of the person appears. We do not know if this is because they were subjects without taxable assets or perhaps because the register was left half completed. All the valuations, whether of immovable or movable, were made in *masmudines*, a type of Andalusian coin that was very habitual in the period.

Some of those whose assets were valued also have the amount noted down that they would have to pay in the tax that was the reason why this register was made. In principle, there were two different quotas depending on whether the asset was immovable or movable. These quotas are not expressed in *masmudines*, but in *sous* and *diners*, presumably of Barcelona.³⁵ It is therefore a hybrid register of *manifest* and *talla*.³⁶ The form of the imposition of the *comú* is written down on the first page in the book. Basically, different taxes were levied on the immovable and the movable, always taxing movable assets a third more than immovable ones, perhaps as a way of compensating for possible imbalances in the corresponding global valuations obtained.³⁷ At the same time, a poll tax of two *diners* per each house (*alberg*) was estab-

lona: see Torras, "El sistema de redacció," 339, 343.

³⁴ Aside from resorting to direct taxation, the other side of taxation in Tortosa, already quite well developed in the first half of the fourteenth century, was the farming of a series of indirect taxes on trade and the circulation of goods. On the effects of taxes on wealth, see: Verdés, Reixach, "Contribuir al impuesto."

³⁵ Since 1298, the city had been granted a royal privilege to be able to use the currency of Barcelona instead of Jaca: Bayerri, *Historia de Tortosa*, 631.

³⁶ Outside from this case, there are estimates in other localities, like those of Valls in 1378 – the earliest surviving ones in that town – that are quite similar, as they also provide an overall estimation of assets, depending on whether they were considered movable or immovable (taxed incomes apart), which is accompanied by the quotas of a first *talla* distribution: see Morelló, "Les estimés de 1378," 9-56; Morelló, "Les estimés de Valls," 9-74.

³⁷ In this *manifest*, the weight of immovable wealth is overwhelming since it represents more than 80% of the total recorded. Perhaps not all movable assets had to be declared, or there was a great deal of concealment – declaring fewer assets than one had – or undervaluation – they were declared for less value than the real ones; all this despite the fact of their being declarations made under oath. As a general rule, subsequent checks were dispensed with, it being considered good enough with this oath.

lished, which we find applied to some of the individuals noted in the register. The same rule, with just the odd small adjustment, is included in the preamble to the 1353 book.

This other *manifest*, although it follows a scheme similar to that of 1316, gives us more detailed information about the immovables valued, whether dwellings or rural possessions. Thus, it includes the estimations assigned to each type of asset, but without establishing any sum totals of the different items recorded. And while the global estimation of the movable remains, the rents from annuities received by each individual are also valued separately. In fact, we begin to glimpse this greater interest in describing the assets that made up the *seti* (immovable) in the *manifest* of 1325, and it was already fully developed by the 1340s, in accordance with another of the surviving books.³⁸ Even so, the subsequent *manifest* of 1353 remains a hybrid register (*manifest-talla*). The type of coin used also remained the same: *masmudines* for valuations and *sous* and *diners* for taxation quotas. Moreover, the poll tax is noted down far more systematically, in this case 1 or 2 *diners* depending on whether they were men or women, and not per *alberg* (house), as appeared written down in 1316, but per hearth. We are after all in the decade of the first general hearth taxes. Every taxpayer has assigned a single payment quota with regard to the collection of the *comú* that was then levied.

However, the *manifests* of 1316 and 1353 include a large number of people not declaring assets who we ought to consider as *nichils*, who possibly only paid the poll tax. In the first book they account for 42,83% of all those inscribed, and in the second *manifest*, 28,57%. Once the 'non-declarers' of 1316 and 1353 have been removed, the difference between both registers is a little over 100 individuals in favour of the first one (1.317 vs. 1.205), which means a decrease of just 8,5%; otherwise, it would be 25,74%. These 'non-declarers of assets' may possibly have been more or less representative of the poorest classes in the city, without taxable assets, or who had very few resources. The reduction in the percentage of 1353 could be understood as one of the multiple consequences of the great loss of population caused by the plague, if it cannot be attributed to a reshaping of family units for fiscal purposes, as perhaps ought to be inferred from the change of name from *alberg* (house) to *foc* (hearth).³⁹

³⁸ ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 19, 1325 and 20, 1348. This last book is before the Black Death, but the exact year (1344?, 1348?) is unknown.

³⁹ The disappearance of *nichils* after the Black Death is a phenomenon documented in other places as well, such as Albi in Occitania, where *nichils* declined from 42% in 1343 to 28% in 1357. Benedictow argues that this may have resulted from the higher mortality of the poor, given their greater social vulnerability to secondary catastrophe effects, as well as from social mobility among survivors: Benedictow, *The Complete History*, 667-9.

3.3 Different types of taxpayers or declarers of goods

As everywhere, the great majority of those included in these registers were heads of family units, all of them presumably citizens of Tortosa.⁴⁰ Women with taxable assets account for about a fifth of the taxpayers in both registers, while the men do so for around three-quarters of them. Seen like this, the pandemic does not seem to have altered the sex ratio in the ownership of assets, in the sense of it having brought about a spectacular rise in the number of widows taking possession of their late husbands' assets, simply because the plague would not have made significant distinctions based on sex, age, or social class.⁴¹

Certain sectors of the population, such as knights and clergymen, are mixed up with the rest of the declarers.⁴² The above had to be on the list for assets purchased from others who were already paying the *comuns* of the city and, in the case of the clergy, for their own assets and also for the receipt of rents associated with ecclesiastical benefices.⁴³ Also, although only in 1316, some convents and hospitals appear registered, but only for the immovable assets they possessed.

Another distinguishing factor between the two registers is the inclusion in 1316 of a dozen Jewish taxpayers. In reality, they must have been few in number in relation to all the Jews who lived in the *call*, where one of the largest Jewish communities in the Crown of Aragon had been established.⁴⁴ All of them appear noted down at the end of the book, each one paying for immovables only, whereas in the later manifest of 1353 there are no Jews, maybe as a result of new agreements established with the council that we do not know about.⁴⁵ The presence of Muslims, despite what was laid down in the *Costums*, is purely symbolic: in 1316 there are only two noted as such, perhaps for having assets they had purchased from Christians.

Here and everywhere, these fiscal registers were compiled in a particular topographic order. However, while the declarers of 1316 are noted as living in

⁴⁰ (*Costums*, heading 4) A citizen was anyone born in Tortosa or its territory, or someone who had been living in the city and territory for at least ten years (1.4.14.). Anyone who came to Tortosa or its territory with his or her *alberg* and made in it his or her stay and main residence was considered an inhabitant of the city (1.4.15).

⁴¹ However, it appears that women and children were more likely to be infected, leading to higher mortality rates among these groups. Mortality was also higher among the poor and destitute, particularly in large cities. See: Benedictow, *The Complete History*, 668-77.

⁴² In the *manifest* of 1316 only one person appears identified as a knight, but we do not rule out there being a few more with taxable assets, as we shall see later.

⁴³ Concerning the different forms of participation of the clergy on municipal taxes, see: Verdés, "La contribución eclesiástica."

⁴⁴ All of them lived in the *call*, both the old and the new one. As Andreu Lascorz points out, in the thirteenth century, the old and new *calls* were next to one another, but, from then on, the new one developed more and more until it absorbed the centre of the old one: Lascorz, *Cultura judeocatalana*, 48-9. The most recent study is the one by Alanyà, *Els jueus de Tortosa*.

⁴⁵ It is taken for granted that the Plague of 1348 marked the start of the Jewish community of Tortosa's process of decline: Lascorz, *Cultura judeocatalana*, 41.

different parishes or urban districts, in the *manifest* of 1353 far more specific locations are mentioned, such as streets, squares or *illes* (blocks of houses). For this reason, it is not possible to infer the number of inhabitants that each parish could have had, or to make comparisons with the parish distribution of 1316.

4. Some results

4.1 Demographics

The figures provided by the *manifests* of 1316 and 1353 do not only tell us about the wealth or poverty of the inhabitants of Tortosa at two specific moments in its history, but they also help us to complete a series of demographic data that, unfortunately, do not usually appear until later decades. Even so, it must be remembered that hearth taxes are also fiscal documents and that, in the words of Gaspar Feliu, their use as a demographic tool is only a proxy for want of better tools.⁴⁶

As was mentioned earlier, in the *manifest* of 1316 there are a total of 2,304 fiscal units, while in that of 1353 the figure is quite a lot lower, 1,711 (25.74% fewer). The omnipresent outbreak of plague in 1348, whose devastating effects in Tortosa have already been described, might be the reason for a large part of this fall.⁴⁷ Other factors associated with the fiscal units registered in the *manifests*, such as the presence or not of certain groups, especially the exclusion of the Jewish hearths in 1353, do not seem to be particularly important in quantitative terms. On the other hand, the reduction in the number of *nichils* could have been important, perhaps the part of the population most affected by the plague, or a possible regrouping of family homes to be able to better withstand the resulting fiscal burden.

The data provided can be contrasted with those of the hearth taxes that were introduced later.⁴⁸ In the case of the one carried out in 1365, in the city of Tortosa *e en los lochs qui han pagat ab ella* (and in the places that have paid with it) a total of 2,006 hearths were counted.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, it is impossible to distinguish which of these 2,006 actually corresponded to Tortosa and which to the rest of the towns and places that were added to it when handing

⁴⁶ Feliu, "La població catalana," 148.

⁴⁷ Although the Black Death was the deadliest, it was probably not the only mortality crisis to hit Tortosa between 1316 and 1353. Joan Maltas has identified several mortality crises in Catalonia during the first half of the fourteenth century, and some of them undoubtedly affected Tortosa. To what extent, however, remains unknown. See Maltas, *Caresties, fams*, 266-89.

⁴⁸ The reason why we do not refer to the hearth tax of 1358 is because Tortosa does not appear in it, despite knowing that it contributed to it with a total of 140,000 *sous*: Pons, "Un fogatjament desconegut," 348.

⁴⁹ Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), *Reial Patrimoni*, Mestre Racional, Volumes, Sèrie General, 2590, f. 78r, 1365.

over the corresponding payment.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the hearth tax of 1378 is clearer in this respect: that year Tortosa had 1.017 hearths, 991 of which corresponded to the city proper and the other 26 to the sector located on the other side of the river.⁵¹ In fact, according to this hearth tax, Tortosa was at that time the fourth most populated city in Catalonia, only behind Barcelona, Perpignan and Lleida.⁵²

However, despite this apparently positive note, the visible loss of population in Tortosa between the 1350s and the late 1380s – something widespread in the Principality – is very noticeable: the fall from the 1.711 hearths of 1353 to the supposed 1.017 of 1378 would mean the disappearance of 30% of the population of Tortosa in twenty-five years. However, the figure of 1378 must be qualified and accepted with all due caution. In the first place, because, as Josep M. Pons i Guri pointed out, neither the unoccupied houses, nor the hearths of Muslims and Jews, nor the beggars, nor all those who had never paid in previous hearth taxes, due either to privilege or custom, were included in the hearth tax.⁵³ Gaspar Feliu adds as possible factors for the sizeable, but probably not so drastic, fall in 1378 the outbreaks of plague in 1362, 1371 and 1375.⁵⁴

Either way, what seems clear is that Tortosa entered the closing stages of the fourteenth century with a lot less population than it had had at the start of the century. In fact, if we compare the figures of 1316 and 1378 – if such a comparison is appropriate, given that we are talking about two different types of fiscal sources – in sixty-two years Tortosa would have lost 55,86% of its population, an extremely high percentage that we cannot regard as valid, above all given the special circumstances already mentioned of the 1378 hearth tax. In any case, the exact quantification of the real loss of inhabitants of Tortosa, which does seem completely undeniable, is for the moment impossible, but what seems obvious is that the different outbreaks of plague that occurred from the 1340s onwards played a crucial role in it.

⁵⁰ In fact, as Gaspar Feliu points out, throughout the hearth tax a list by *vegueries* is made, counting the royal and allodial hearths separately, of those belonging to citizens and of the hearths of the privileged (Church and nobility). However, the only case in which this is not carried out is precisely the one for the *vegueria* of Tortosa, where only the castellany of Amposta appears, on one hand, and the rest of the *vegueria*, on the other: Feliu, “La demografia baixmedieval,” 18–9. The author cites the now classic edition of this hearth tax, that can be found in Iglésies, “El fogaje de 1365–70.”

⁵¹ Redondo, *El fogatjament general*, 208, n. 569, 391, 415.

⁵² It must be said, however, that Tortosa was far removed from the first two cities, which had, respectively, 7.295 and 4.232 hearths, but much more strongly aligned with Lleida, for which 1.218 were counted.

⁵³ Pons, “Un fogatjament desconegut,” 337; Feliu, “La demografia baixmedieval,” 19.

⁵⁴ Feliu, “La població catalana,” 154; Feliu, “La demografia baixmedieval,” 19.

4.2 Analysis

As has been mentioned already, the registers studied are hybrid in nature, as they do not only include the valuation of wealth, but also the payment quotas resulting from the assets taxed. In this study, we shall overlook this second aspect in order to focus solely on the estimations of the patrimony of the people of Tortosa in 1316 and 1353. These data are, therefore, those presented below processed in the form of different types of statistical indexes, after removing from the sample the heads of households who are assumed not to have any kind of wealth (*nichils*).⁵⁵

Table 1. *General data of Tortosa according to the manifests of 1316 and 1353 (without nichils)*

Year	Number	Wealth (in mas.)	Progress.	Gini	Palma	SD10%
1316	1.317	382.890,5	0,27	0,72	18,9	58,08
1353	1.205	327.272,83	0,27	0,76	25	63,85

Sources: ACT, *Manifest de 1316*; ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 21, 1353.

In the first place, the volume of wealth recorded in the *manifest* of 1316 is 382.890,5 *masmudines*, while in that of 1353 it is 327.272,83 *mas*. The difference between both registers, of 55.617,67 *mas.*, would imply a fall in the city's overall wealth of 14,53%. If we bear in mind the apparent impact of the Black Death on the population, mentioned above, we may consider it to be a relatively low percentage.

Surprisingly, the index of progressivity or clustering is the same in the registers of 1316 and 1353. By clustering we are referring to the ratio between the number of fiscal categories used by those responsible for the taxation and the total number of taxpayers. In this way, a progressivity of 1 would represent an extreme dissociation, in which all the taxpayers would have a different wealth value assigned, while a value of 0 would imply that the patrimony of all of them would be estimated identically.⁵⁶ In the case of Tortosa, a progressivity of 0,27 indicates a clear tendency to value the assets of the people of Tortosa similarly in both *manifests* and, therefore, the need to interpret the indexes of inequality obtained with a certain degree of caution.

Let us begin then with the Gini coefficient, one of the most common for calculating inequality, whose widespread use makes it easy to approach studies done in very diverse timelines and geographical areas. As can be observed in Table 1, in both years the Gini coefficient is remarkably high, 0,72 in 1316 and 0,76 in 1353. Therefore, Tortosa would be situated within values quite

⁵⁵ As suggested by Alfani, this approach ensures that inequality indices remain as homogeneous as possible. As he points out, the distortion caused by including these *nichils* is, in fact, very limited: Alfani, "Economic Inequality," 9. See also Miquel, Verdés, "Contribución al estudio," 162-3.

⁵⁶ Reixach, "Fuentes para el estudio," 578; cf. Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, "Economic Inequality."

normal in the period for medium-sized to large European cities, and even slightly above.⁵⁷ In any case, what is most interesting for us in this respect is the increase in inequality between 1316 and 1353. While it is true that it is not a huge rise, it is obvious that, during the almost forty years between both registers, the wealth of the people of Tortosa became distributed (even) less equitably. We get the same idea from the Palma ratio, in which the wealth possessed by the richest 10% is contrasted with that of the poorest 40%, which in this case grows between 1316 and 1353 by more than five points. This increase is directly related to the percentage of wealth amassed by the members of one of the deciles into which we divide the population of Tortosa, those in the top decile. Thus, while in 1316 the members of the tenth decile possessed 58,05% of the city's estimated wealth, in 1353 this percentage was greater, 63,85%. In a nutshell, between 1316 and 1353 the wealth of Tortosa diminished, but what did remain was concentrated more in the hands of the wealthiest.

This appears to contradict findings on inequality elsewhere in Europe, where its unequivocal decrease after the Black Death has been well documented.⁵⁸ This was the result of several factors, among which the rise in real wages (reducing income inequality) and partible inheritance systems (leading in patrimonial fragmentation and a more active market) played a crucial role.⁵⁹ The reasons behind this divergence in Tortosa, despite some possible explanations, remain unknown, at least until additional case studies expand the existing research on inequality before and after the plague.⁶⁰

Table 2. *Data referring to the male taxpayers*

Year	Number	Wealth (in mas.)	Progress.	Gini	Palma	SD10%
1316	962	293.925	0,32	0,73	19,82	58,82
1353	895	247.330,5	0,32	0,77	26,61	65,52

Sources: ACT, *Manifest de 1316*; ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 21, 1353.

⁵⁷ As is mentioned in Furió *et al*, "Measuring economic inequality," 180, during the Late Middle Ages the most habitual Gini index among the heavily populated and economically dynamic areas is between 0,60 and 0,70. Thus, for example, the Gini index of Valencia in 1354 is 0,61; that of Valls, a small Catalan town, was 0,66 in 1378, and that of Seville in 1384, 0,80. See: Furió *et al*, "Measuring economic inequality;" Almenar, Chismol, Ruiz, "Aproximación a la desigualdad."

⁵⁸ See Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality." For instance, in Prato, a Gini index of 0,703 was calculated for 1325, decreasing to 0,487 in 1356. In Albi, the Gini index was 0,637 in 1343 and 0,628 in 1357. See also the introduction of Cristoferi in this volume.

⁵⁹ Alfani, "Economic Inequality;" Alfani "Epidemics, Inequality."

⁶⁰ Alfani argues that in geographically peripheral areas, such as the Iberian Peninsula or Ireland, the consequences of the epidemic were different from those in other regions, such as the Italian peninsula or France. In fact, it has been noted that during the years of the Black Death, the Iberian territories experienced an increase in inequality, mainly due to rising prices that did not fall as quickly as in other European regions. As a result, the inflation that followed the mortality crisis quickly offset the increase in nominal wages. See: Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality," 15; Álvarez-Nogal, Prados, Santiago-Caballero, "Economic effects," 43-4. It should also be noted that, since the Middle Ages, the inheritance system in Catalonia favoured the first-born son (*hereu*) or, in the absence of male heirs, the first-born daughter (*pubilla*), who became the primary recipient of the family patrimony (Ferrer, *Hereus, pubilles*, 29-33).

As can be seen in Table 3, with regard to the male taxpayers, it must first be pointed out that in both years they represented nearly three-quarters of the total: specifically, 73,04% in 1316, and 74,27% in 1353. It is not surprising therefore, that the wealth they amassed also formed much of the estimated total: 76,76% in 1316 and 75,57% in 1353. Curiously, despite supposing a higher percentage with respect to the total number of taxpayers in 1353 than in 1316, the valuation of their wealth was lower after the Black Death, something that, as we shall see later on, is directly related to the average value of the declarations.

Although the progressivity of the data referring to the men is a little higher than that of those corresponding to the total number of people, this does not seem to have a direct impact on the Gini and Palma indexes, which only slightly increase in 1316 and 1353. It seems clear that this is directly influenced by the fact that those who comprised the tenth decile of the men amassed more wealth than the global tenth decile, 0,74% more in 1316 and 1,67% more in 1353. Under no circumstances is it a significant change, something that helps to explain that the variations in the figures relative to the men are minimal with respect to those referring globally to Tortosa.

Table 3. *Data referring to the female taxpayers*

Year	Number	Wealth (in mas.)	Progress.	Gini	Palma	SD10%
1316	254	49.713	0,41	0,7	16,06	55,34
1353	260	58.547,33	0,4	0,73	20,18	59,73

Sources: ACT, *Manifest de 1316*; ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 21, 1353.

The picture provided by the data relative to the female taxpayers, as can be seen in Table 4, is quite different to that of the men. In the first place, because they represented only a fifth of the total number of taxpayers: 19,29% in 1316 and 21,58% in 1353. As a consequence, the percentages of assets declared are also very much lower, only 12,98% of the wealth in 1316 and 17,89% in 1353. However, it is useful to point out both the increase experienced by the percentage of female taxpayers, and, above all, by that of their patrimony over the decades between the two *manifests* we are studying. Possibly, therefore, one of the consequences of the Black Death was, precisely, a redistribution of the wealth that benefitted the female population of Tortosa.

Curiously, in the case of the women the progressivity is in both years quite a lot higher than that of the men and the global population, something that in theory ought to entail greater reliability of the results obtained. Whatever the case, the reality is that, as far as the indexes are concerned, the female observatory follows the same trend as the global and the male one, although on a lower scale. According to the Gini and Palma indexes, inequality among the women also increased between 1316 and 1353, but less than among the men and among the total population. The same thing happened with the percentage of wealth possessed by the tenth decile. We therefore see that the distribution of wealth among the women was also markedly unequal, although less

than among Tortosa as a whole, and above all, less than among the men, and that, despite growing between 1316 and 1353, it did so less markedly.

Table 4. *Mean and median values of the declarations (in mas.)*

Year	Mean			Median		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1316	290,73	305,54	195,72	77	77	56,6
1353	271,6	276,35	225,18	60	60	50

Sources: ACT, *Manifest de 1316*; ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, *Imposicions*, Albarans, 21, 1353.

The lack of correspondence between the percentages of declarers and of wealth in the case of the men and women can be explained by the obvious discrepancies between the mean and median estimations of both groups, as can be seen in Table 5. In 1316 the mean declaration of the men was 5,09% higher than that of the total number of taxpayers, and 56,11% greater than that of the women. In 1353, both the mean global estimation and that of the men diminished considerably, but on the other hand that of the women increased. This is why that year the men's mean declaration was 1.75% higher than that of the total, but 'only' 22,72% greater than the women's. On the other hand, the same is not the case with the median ones. In all three cases they fall between 1316 and 1353, but while that of the men and that of the total number of taxpayers is identical in the two years studied, that of the women is, as was predictable, considerably lower. However, percentage-wise, the fall in the median women's valuation was less than that of the global and the men's, 11,66% and 22,08%, respectively.

4.3 *The major taxpayers in 1316 and 1353*

We shall now focus our attention on what would be the most representative group of the patriciate of Tortosa, namely, the wealthiest, or, at least, those who declared greater levels of wealth.

Table 5. *The highest declarers of 1316*

	Declarer	Wealth (in mas.)
1.	Guillem Pinyol	12.150
2.	Mascarós Garidell	9.525
3.	Joan Despuig	6.500
4.	Jaume Monge	5.000
5.	Pasqual Sifré	4.570
6.	heirs of Açach Avinacara	4.500
7.	wife of Ramon de Teià	3.907
8.	Pere d'Almenar	3.900
9.	Simó Rafart	3.500
10.	house of the Hospital	3.378

11.	heir of Domingo Ferrando	3.250
12.	Dalmau des Jardí	3.212
13.	Eiximèn de Vallobar	3.100
14.	Guillem Terré	3.020
15.	Ramon Roig	3.000

Source: ACT, *Manifest de 1316*.

In 1316, the 15 highest declarers have staggered valuations above 3.000 *mas*. The wealthiest man in Tortosa at the time, Guillem Pinyol, possessed a total of 12.150 *mas*. He, together with the second and third highest declarers, Mascarós Garidell and Joan Despuig, belonged to families that went back to the earliest days of the conquest of the city.⁶¹ Some of them had estates in nearby areas, as in the case of the Pinyol family, who possessed Cardó, among other territorial domains, and also in the case of the Despuig family, who were lords of Paüls. In fact, Joan Despuig's declaration of assets included this castle, valued at 5.000 *mas*.⁶² From the municipal point of view, these places were inside the territory of Tortosa, which could be a reason why they were considered to be part of the city's tax contribution.⁶³ We may presume that Guillem Pinyol's estimation must also have included some of the family's possessions: otherwise, such a high valuation of assets is hard to explain. Despite everything, none of the three is classed as a knight. Whether they were or not, or whether they were classed as citizens like the rest or not, the fact is that they were also considered taxpayers of the municipality on account of what must have been a quite significant part of their patrimonies.

The remaining taxpayers on the list have large but less outstanding valuations. As can be seen, among the fifteen highest declarers of 1316 there is an entity, the house of the Hospital, as well as some heirs and one woman. All of them, except for the Jewish heirs, are below 4.000 *mas*.

As to the distribution of immovables and movables, of the fifteen, ten only declared immovables, beginning with the four largest fortunes in the ranking. And with regard to the rest of the taxpayers who present both types of assets, there are only two who surpass 50% with regard to the valuation of the movable, with 2.000 *mas*. each against lower amounts of immovables.⁶⁴ All in all

⁶¹ By then the Garidell family had amassed a considerable patrimony: see Virgili, "Els conqueridors," 269-72. Tomàs Garidell was thought to be one of the wealthiest citizens of Tortosa in the reign of James I, according to Bayerri, *Historia de Tortosa*, 622. For other information relative to each of these dynasties of lesser local nobility we base ourselves on the study by Beguer, *Els llinatges*, 63 ff. (Despuig), 73 ff. (Garidell) and 175 ff. (Pinyol). In Manresa, knightly families were also among the most prominent groups: see Fynn-Paul, *Family, Work, and Household*.

⁶² This place had been in the possession of the Despuig family since the years immediately following the conquest of the city: Beguer, *Els llinatges*, 63.

⁶³ In relation to the castle of Paüls, the city of Tortosa had certain rights recognized there by virtue of a royal sentence in the early fourteenth century: Bayerri, *Historia de Tortosa*, 632.

⁶⁴ One must remember, though, that capitalized incomes were also counted as immovable assets.

it follows the habitual trend of the whole register when it comes to prioritizing immovable assets as the fundamental base for the direct tax.⁶⁵

Table 6. *The highest declarers of 1353*

	Declarer	Wealth (in <i>mas.</i>)
1.	Pere Belsa	9.090
2.	Guillem Pinyol	8.750
3.	Bernat Figuera	6.900
4.	Berenguer Despuig	5.900
5.	Ramon Goda	5.725
6.	Jaume de Tous	5.550
7.	Pere Cima	4.550
8.	heirs of Pere Gonçalbis	4.300
9.	Blanca, widow of Arnau Bartomeu	4.060
10.	Pere Sacosta	4.000
11.	Guillem Despuig	3.700
12.	Jaume Tarascó	3.645
13.	Gualda, widow of Guillem Camaria	3.612
14.	Pere de Castellet	3.600
15.	Ramon Despuig	3.600

Source: ACBE, *Fons municipal*, Comú, Imposicions, Albarans, 21, 1353.

In 1353, the bar for the fifteen highest declarers of assets is set at 3.600 *mas.* In first place we have Pere Belsa with an estimation distributed equally between immovable and movable assets, amounting to just over 9.000 *mas.*⁶⁶ In second place, once again we have Guillem Pinyol – probably a son with the same name as the one in 1316 – in this case with a total of 8.750 *mas.*, all immovables.⁶⁷ This figure represents a fall of 28% with respect to the Guillem Pinyol of 1316. All the others come below 7.000 *mas.* Among them we can point out Bernat Figuera, due to the fact that he had various annuity rents noted down.⁶⁸ We also have two widows, the first of whom was in ninth place with just over 4.000 *mas.*

Among the main declarers of 1353 there are no longer any Garidells, but there are three Despuigs. Ramon, in fifteenth position, possessed the castle of

⁶⁵ This is not surprising if we consider that, as Alfani states, “Real estate (lands and buildings) [...] was by far the main component of wealth in preindustrial rural societies”, and therefore it was always included in property tax records: Alfani, “Economic Inequality,” 9.

⁶⁶ This individual had many *albergs*, as well as various country estates with vines and olive trees (all the properties amount to 4.450 *mas.*), as well as receiving various rents (270 *mas.*) and having movable assets valued at 4.370 *mas.*

⁶⁷ Broken down as follows: the *alberg* for 1.000 *mas.*, and other possessions amounting to 4.050 *mas.*, the oven of Sant Jaume (200 *mas.*) and several annuity rents estimated at 3.500 *mas.*

⁶⁸ It includes three *albergs* (1.200 *mas.*), various country estates (1.600 *mas.*), up to six annuities received from various places (2.190 *mas.*) and movable assets for 2.000 *mas.*

Paüls, this time valued at 3.000 *mas.*, 2.000 less than in 1316. The sum of the wealth of all three, 13.200 *mas.*, far exceeds the wealth of the richest man of the moment. The rest of the list features other families, which suggests that, over the period of time studied here, there had been an important renewal in the richest families in Tortosa in the mid-fourteenth century. Of course, the levels of wealth of this post-plague group had also fallen a little with respect to the maximum levels reached prior to it. All in all, a greater concentration – or rather, levelling – of the wealth in brackets that were lower in relation to the situation in 1316 seems to be inferred, which implies that just after the Plague an important restructuring of local wealth took place, in the higher echelons of society at least.

Lastly, as regards the distribution of immovables and movables, one must note once again the anomaly represented by some of these largest fortunes only having immovable assets valued, as if the respective declarers did not possess any movable assets, something highly unlikely, or perhaps they were not obliged to declare them. Thus, of the fifteen richest individuals in 1353, there are eight who only declare immovable assets, and, of those who have both immovable and movable assets valued, only three have a higher valuation of movables than immovables. Moreover, the taxation of a larger number of rents, especially if they were large amounts, was beginning to be a distinguishing feature of the most outstanding fortunes of the moment, fully coinciding with the expansion in Catalonia of annuity credit. At least, in the case of Guillem Pinyol, the valuation of the rents received represents 40% of his entire fortune, while for Bernat Figuera it is somewhat lower, 31,7%.

5. *Conclusions*

After the analysis conducted in the preceding sections, we ought to be able to answer some of the main questions posed in the introduction to this article. On one hand, whether or not inequality increased among the population of Tortosa during the fourteenth century, and on the other, what impact the demographic crisis in the middle of the century had on it, bearing in mind especially the chronicles that estimate the death rate due to the plague as more than two-thirds of the population.

In the first place, it seems undeniable that in 1353, only five years after the plague, the population of Tortosa was lower than in 1316. The figures supplied by the two compared *manifests* indicate this, if all the fiscal units are counted, and if the *nichils* are excluded. Depending on the different variables in play, we obtain unequal percentages, but up to a maximum situated around a 25% drop, much less than the supposed 66% of 1348. It could be argued, however, that the demographic recovery must have been rapid before the further waves of plague hit the population once again, possibly due to immigration. The comparison of the figures of the 1353 *manifest* with those of hearth taxes of the second half of the fourteenth century, especially the one in 1378, par-

tially illustrates the subsequent fall in the number of hearths, as, when all is said and done, they are different types of fiscal sources and therefore difficult to compare.

Secondly, between 1316 and 1353 one sees a fall in the volume of wealth of 14,5%, a percentage that is almost twice as high as the 8,5% obtained from the respective number of declarers of assets. In consequence, the means estimated in both years also diminish. Therefore, in 1353 there was less wealth in Tortosa, but it was distributed differently. The Gini coefficient already indicates a slight increase in inequality, while the Palma ratio enables us to clearly see a greater concentration of the wealth among the richer classes of the urban population. The women, who only represented 20% of the taxable population, follow another pattern. Between 1316 and 1353, inequality among them also increased, but less markedly than among the male population. On the other hand, the women amassed on average more wealth than in 1316, while in the case of the men it was reduced.

Thirdly, we have seen an important renewal in the wealthiest families as a result of comparing the top fifteen of 1316 and 1353. Despite the survival of some families (Pinyol, Despuig), many of the new rich in 1353 were members of other families. Whether this renewal can only be explained by the length of time between both dates, or by the more recent impact of the plague, which among other effects drastically reduced the number of Councillors of Tortosa, at this moment in time it is difficult to know, but it could be indicative of a high degree of social mobility. We have also seen that the levels of wealth of this select group in 1353 were more similar than before. Finally, with regard to the composition of patrimonies, one must point out the number and the variety of properties they possessed, and also the large number of rents they were receiving, and the high percentage indexes of the latter in the estimations of their wealth.

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Diseguaglianze sociali e indicatori archeologici: quali fonti per la lettura del Trecento?

di Paola Orecchioni

Il presente contributo riguarda l'utilizzo delle fonti e dei metodi archeologici come strumenti per comprendere alcuni sviluppi economici e sociali in atto nel Trecento. Le ricerche sembrerebbero suggerire che gli avvenimenti di questa intensa fase storica influirono profondamente sulla condizione materiale delle persone, motivo per cui le fonti archeologiche devono senz'altro essere considerate uno strumento strategico per la ricerca. Nello specifico, il tema delle diseguaglianze sarà declinato affrontando due questioni centrali nell'analisi sociale del fenomeno, ovvero i modi di consumo, letti attraverso la fonte ceramica, e l'analisi dei regimi alimentari. In questo campo il potenziale informativo delle fonti archeologiche è cresciuto in maniera esponenziale negli ultimi anni grazie a un più frequente e sistematico ricorso alle analisi scientifiche su reperti di varia natura.

The paper concerns the use of archaeological sources and methods as tools for understanding some specific economic and social developments of the fourteenth century. Since the changes that occurred during this period seem to have had a profound impact on the material condition of people, archaeological sources must certainly be considered as strategic tools. Specifically, the theme of inequalities will be addressed by tackling two central issues in the social analysis of the phenomenon, namely modes of consumption, read through the ceramic source, and the analysis of dietary regimes. On these issues, archaeological sources have great potential, which has recently been enhanced by more frequent and systematic recourse to scientific analysis of the finds.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Europa occidentale, indicatori archeologici, regimi alimentari, diseguaglianza sociale.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Western Europe, archaeological proxies, food regimes, social inequality.

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1. Introduzione

Negli ultimi anni, sulla scia di quello che è stato definito “un vero e proprio boom di riflessioni sulla disuguaglianza”¹ che ha investito i più diversi ambiti disciplinari di ricerca (con in primo piano le scienze sociali ed economiche), è cresciuto anche l'interesse sul possibile approccio archeologico allo studio sul tema. L'ultimo decennio ha visto la pubblicazione di un certo numero di saggi che mirano a legittimare il ruolo specifico degli studi archeologici, ritenuti capaci di offrire una prospettiva sulle disuguaglianze diversa e complementare rispetto alle altre discipline.² La discussione è avvenuta principalmente nell'ambito della archeologia antropologica di stampo statunitense, dove già diversi decenni fa alcuni archeologi – di chiara formazione marxista – avevano dato il via a nuove linee di ricerca che miravano a investigare le relazioni di potere e di opportunità sociale del passato con gli strumenti offerti dal metodo archeologico.³ Dobbiamo sottolineare che, sebbene in questi lavori le riflessioni siano generali e potenzialmente valide per ogni epoca, nei fatti, i casi di studio portati avanti riguardano prevalentemente l'epoca preistorica, con qualche incursione nell'epoca classica o nel contesto della fase coloniale post-medievale americana.⁴

Muovendoci verso l'ambito europeo e restringendo il campo all'archeologia medievale possiamo notare come una riflessione più matura sulla differenziazione sociale ed economica sia stata raggiunta soprattutto negli studi focalizzati sull'epoca tardoantica e alto-medievale. Questo risultato è dovuto anche al contributo fondamentale di uno storico come Chris Wickham, il quale nelle sue ricostruzioni dell'economia e della società medievale ha messo in primo piano la complessità della stratificazione sociale, facendo ampio ricorso anche alle fonti archeologiche.⁵ In campo prettamente archeologico, un caso esemplare di ricezione dei temi più attuali del dibattito storico e delle acquisizioni portate in questo campo dall'archeologia sociale e antropologica è rappresentato dagli studi condotti dall'*équipe* guidata da Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo sulla penisola iberica. Il gruppo di ricerca, negli ultimi dieci anni, grazie a un ammirevole approccio multidisciplinare che abbraccia lo studio tradizionale dei reperti, l'archeologia dei paesaggi agrari e le discipline della bioarcheologia, ha prodotto una mole davvero impressionante di studi.

¹ Graeber, Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 7.

² Kohler, Smith, *Ten Thousand Years of Inequality*; Graeber, Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*; Beck, Quinn, “Balancing the scales;” Cerasuolo, *The Archaeology of Inequality*; Peterson, Drennan, “Letting the Gini;” Semple, Gomes Coelho, “Materialising inequalities.”

³ Paynter, “The Archaeology of Equality;” McGuire, Paynter, *The Archaeology of Inequality*; Chapman, *Archaeologies of complexity*.

⁴ Per una recentissima panoramica su temi e contesti si veda il volume 54, fascicolo 4, anno 2022 della rivista *World Archaeology*, dedicato proprio al tema di *Archaeology of Inequality*, a cura di Sarah Semple e Rui Gomes Coelho. Si veda anche Wright, “Domestication.”

⁵ Come ben noto, Chris Wickham ha prodotto una mole eccezionale di lavori basati su questo metodo. Si citano a titolo esemplificativo i due suoi più recenti e ampi lavori di sintesi sul Medioevo: Wickham, *The Donkey & the boat* e *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

Questi hanno permesso di indagare molti aspetti legati ai temi delle diseguaglianze e della complessità sociale, con una particolare attenzione rivolta alle comunità rurali. Anche in questo caso, tuttavia, l'ambito cronologico al centro delle riflessioni è principalmente l'alto Medioevo.⁶

Spostandoci in Italia e più a ridosso del periodo di nostro interesse dobbiamo constatare che la questione delle diseguaglianze non sembra trovare ancora uno spazio adeguato all'interno dell'agenda archeologica sul basso medioevo. Le ricerche puntuali basate sulle testimonianze di scavo, così come le analisi d'insieme sull'articolazione interna della società, sulla mobilità sociale e sui consumi – questioni centrali per la comprensione del Trecento e delle diseguaglianze – sono ancora piuttosto rare. Questo nonostante in più occasioni sia stata sottolineata la scarsa assimilazione degli stimoli offerti dall'archeologia sociale nella produzione degli archeologi medievisti italiani e la necessità di una maggiore conoscenza archeologica delle fasi finali del medioevo.⁷ Un importante passo avanti in questo senso è costituito dal recente volume monografico di *Archeologia medievale* dedicato alla congiuntura del Trecento. Lo scopo principale del volume era proprio quello di cominciare a interrogare i dati materiali esistenti e di invogliare i ricercatori a raccoglierne di nuovi, in modo mirato.⁸

Fatta questa necessaria premessa sullo stato dell'arte vorremmo ora soffermarci per un momento sul concetto di diseguaglianza. La varietà delle questioni affrontate nei testi raccolti in questo volume è la prova evidente dei molteplici significati che il termine può assumere, anche quando declinato specificatamente nell'ambito della sfera economica e sociale. Con il nostro contributo cercheremo di capire se e come l'esplorazione archeologica della diseguaglianza possa rivelarsi efficace, in particolare, per l'arco cronologico compreso tra il tardo Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento. Ma prima di procedere e di capire il come è doveroso domandarsi: quale disuguaglianza possono raccontare le testimonianze materiali?

Come ben sappiamo, la disciplina archeologica è 'materiale' per definizione; quindi, qualsiasi approccio allo studio delle diseguaglianze deve basarsi necessariamente sul riconoscimento e sull'analisi di tracce tangibili di differenziazione sociale. Occorre, però, una certa cautela. Se pensiamo a una diseguaglianza di tipo puramente economico/reddituale dobbiamo tenere ben presente che il rapporto tra condizione economica e il possesso e l'uso di beni materiali non è sempre lineare. Un maggiore consumo di beni o l'acquisto

⁶ Quirós, *Agrarian Archaeology*; Quirós, *Demografía, paleopatologías*; Quirós, *Social complexity*; Quirós, *Social Inequality in Early*; Grau-Sologestoa, Albarella, Quirós, "Urban medieval and post-medieval zooarchaeology."

⁷ Gelichi, "Il 'canto delle sirene';" Molinari, "Archeologia e mobilità;" Molinari, "Archeologia medievale e storia economica;" Molinari, "La ceramica medievale."

⁸ Molinari, "La 'congiuntura del Trecento'." La natura dei saggi contenuti nel volume è molto varia. Spesso ci si sofferma sulle conseguenze dalla crisi epidemica e quindi sulla seconda metà del XIV secolo e solo alcuni autori affrontano temi direttamente legati alla differenziazione socio-economica (Ferri, Moine, "Definire lo spazio;" Orecchioni, "Produzione, circolazione").

di oggetti più costosi o ricercati non è necessariamente legato a condizioni economiche migliori o di aumentato benessere e viceversa. Prendiamo per un momento in prestito la nozione di *capability framework* sviluppato in seno alla cosiddetta 'economia del benessere' che definisce una distinzione tra l'uguaglianza di risultati, in cui gli individui possiedono livelli comparabili di ricchezza materiale e l'uguaglianza di opportunità, che si verifica quando le persone hanno la libertà di scegliere i propri modi di vita.⁹ Questo concetto, trasferito in ambito archeologico, ci aiuta a capire che alcune delle disuguaglianze che leggiamo a livello della cultura materiale, più che alla reale condizione economica degli individui, possono essere legate alla sfera sociale, alle mode del tempo, ai modi di consumo e alla rappresentazione di sé attraverso i beni materiali. Questo, ad esempio, è quello che sembrerebbe emergere dal primo caso di studio che presenteremo e che utilizza come *proxy* la fonte archeologica per eccellenza, ovvero la ceramica. La seconda questione che vorremmo approfondire riguarda, invece, un indicatore che possiamo senz'altro considerare più rappresentativo dell'effettiva condizione di benessere degli individui, ovvero l'alimentazione. L'analisi della dieta e della nutrizione, infatti, è considerato un parametro fondamentale nello studio delle disuguaglianze sia nell'ambito delle scienze sociali e antropologiche sia per quanto riguarda le discipline storiche, come, del resto, appare chiaro anche dai diversi contributi dedicati al tema presenti in questo stesso volume.¹⁰ Nelle pagine che seguono vedremo insieme come il metodo archeologico abbia sviluppato negli ultimi anni una capacità d'indagine eccezionale per lo studio dei regimi alimentari e di altri temi a esso strettamente legati, come lo stato di salute della popolazione o l'evoluzione della produzione agraria.

2. Consumi ceramici e distinzione sociale

Prima di procedere con le riflessioni basate sull'evidenza fornita dello studio della ceramica occorre chiarire perché riteniamo che questa categoria di oggetti possa essere considerato un buon strumento per indagare le disuguaglianze, intese come differenziazioni nei modi di consumo.¹¹ Come già accennato lo studio dei beni materiali e in particolare delle ceramiche non consente, se non in pochi e specifici casi, la lettura di un dislivello di tipo reddituale che sia effettivamente misurabile. Inoltre, non è semplice attribuire un preciso valore economico al vasellame in ceramica perché esso è molto variabile a seconda dalla tecnologia di produzione, oltre che nel tempo e nel-

⁹ Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*.

¹⁰ Si vedano i contributi di Feller, Specke e Lambrecht, Palermo e Wilkin in questo volume.

¹¹ Diversi studiosi si sono soffermati sul tema. Per il Medioevo si vedano, ad esempio: Cumberpatch, Blinkhorn, *Not so much a pot*; Gelichi, "Pottery as Inequality?"; Gutiérrez, *Mediterranean pottery*, 4-10; Jervis, *Pottery and social life*.

lo spazio.¹² Tuttavia, in quanto oggetto domestico di uso comune e per via della sua apparente marginalità nel commercio internazionale, spesso negli studi è considerato un bene di basso valore non idoneo a leggere differenze di status.¹³ D'altro canto, come ben sappiamo, la ceramica è senz'altro uno degli strumenti più informativi nelle mani degli archeologi e, infatti, è quello più largamente impiegato, soprattutto in virtù della mole dei dati disponibili. L'alta percentuale dei rinvenimenti di ceramiche nei depositi archeologici è un fatto ben noto a qualsiasi scavatore. Questa è dovuta sia alle caratteristiche intrinseche dell'oggetto, che non è deperibile e/o riciclabile, sia al fatto che costituiva uno strumento di larghissimo consumo; nel medioevo era impiegata quotidianamente in tutte le cucine, sulla mensa e in dispensa e questo a prescindere dalla classe sociale, seppur con le dovute differenziazioni. In sintesi, i numeri rendono la fonte ceramica più efficace per analisi di comparazione rispetto ad altre categorie di oggetti magari anche più prestigiosi e con una connotazione più evidente di *status symbol*. La possibilità di contare e mettere a confronto centinaia, spesso migliaia, di frammenti rispetto al resto dei reperti, spesso quantificabili nell'ordine delle decine di oggetti, offre una base di dati più solida e, quindi, una migliore rappresentatività statistica dei dati. Per tutti questi motivi la ceramica, con il corretto approccio metodologico, ci consente di ricavare informazioni sui fenomeni sociali, sulle condizioni materiali di vita e, soprattutto sui modi di consumo e sull'emulazione sociale, elementi essenziali nello studio sulle diseguaglianze economiche e sociali.¹⁴ Fondamentale è poi il contesto. La distinzione nei consumi si può cogliere, più che soffermandosi sul valore o sul significato di un singolo oggetto di lusso, per mezzo di una attenta analisi delle associazioni di frammenti all'interno dell'intero corredo ceramico.¹⁵ Le valutazioni più fini si possono portare avanti tenendo conto di tutte le classi ceramiche presenti: ad esempio, considerando la relazione tra la ceramica da fuoco utilizzata per la cottura dei cibi, la ceramica da mensa e dispensa nuda e quella decorata più fine. Vedere come tale rapporto si è evoluto nel tempo può essere indicativo di un diverso grado di sofisticazione nella vita quotidiana che a sua volta può riflettere differenze nei modi di stare a tavola e persino nei regimi dietetici.

Tutti questi aspetti sono stati al centro di un lavoro recentemente edito dedicato allo studio dei consumi ceramici in Italia e in Inghilterra tra Due e Trecento.¹⁶ Nel volume, le considerazioni più approfondite avevano come focus principale la fase successiva alla metà del XIV secolo, in quanto miravano, soprattutto, a cogliere gli effetti della crisi epidemica sui modi di utilizzo dei

¹² Gutiérrez, *Mediterranean pottery*, 5-8.

¹³ Jervis, *Pottery and social life*. Sul ruolo apparentemente marginale della ceramica nell'ambito del commercio internazionale vedi: Gelichi, "Introduzione" e Orecchioni, "La ceramica come merce."

¹⁴ Per una riflessione sull'utilizzo della ceramica nell'ambito degli studi sul medioevo si veda, ad esempio, Molinari, "La ceramica medievale."

¹⁵ Gelichi, "Pottery as Inequality?," 97.

¹⁶ Orecchioni, *Dopo la peste*.

contenitori ceramici. La raccolta e l'elaborazione dei dati ha però riguardato l'intero periodo di riferimento: dunque, in questa sede vorremmo provare a mettere l'accento sull'insieme di informazioni acquisite per l'arco cronologico compreso tra la seconda metà del Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento.

Prima di discutere dei risultati, dobbiamo fare una breve parentesi metodologica, un po' tecnica e forse non propriamente appassionante per i non addetti ai lavori ma necessaria per chiarire la rappresentatività dei dati utilizzati. Il lavoro ha preso il via da uno studio approfondito, portato avanti per diversi anni, del materiale ceramico recuperato negli scavi effettuati presso il castello di Montecchio Vesponi, situato nelle campagne della Valdichiana aretina.¹⁷ I reperti analizzati provenivano da contesti riconducibili alle abitazioni dei contadini residenti all'interno del castello. Oltre al classico catalogo dei reperti, i dati sui frammenti ceramici sono stati rielaborati per mezzo di varie tabelle e grafici basati sui conteggi dei frammenti. I risultati raggiunti e le possibilità di analisi che questo metodo offriva sono apparsi incoraggianti e ci hanno spinto a tentare di portare avanti la ricerca per mezzo di uno studio comparativo che permettesse di analizzare contemporaneamente più siti. Abbiamo poi scelto di estendere l'ambito di studio al di fuori dei confini nazionali per provare a verificare se l'approccio scelto poteva risultare valido per individuare eventuali tendenze su scala internazionale. Per una comparazione ottimale sono stati selezionati siti che potessero raccontare diverse realtà insediative – quindi città, siti rurali, castelli, porti –, e che fossero rappresentativi di varie condizioni socioeconomiche, attestate da residenze aristocratiche e da abitazioni di mercanti, artigiani e contadini. Per quanto riguarda l'ambito italiano il riesame e la rielaborazione del materiale edito hanno riguardato i siti urbani di Firenze (scavi Via dei Castellani) e Pisa (scavi ex Laboratori Gentili) e i castelli di Montarrenti e Rocca Ricciarda, mentre in Inghilterra sono stati selezionati cinque siti dell'area urbana di Londra, il sito portuale di Southampton, e in ambito rurale i due villaggi di Westbury e Great Linford. È stata quindi messa a punto una strategia mirata che potesse rendere conto del materiale ceramico proveniente da siti così diversi. In sintesi, sono state individuate alcune variabili che abbiamo ritenuto significative per l'analisi dei consumi come la provenienza degli oggetti (da ambito locale o sub-locale, regionale o extra regionale), il grado di complessità dei loro processi produttivi e anche la presenza di elementi decorativi e di rivestimenti; tutti quegli elementi, cioè, che potevano influire sui costi di produzione e vendita. I reperti sono poi stati suddivisi in tre categorie tecnico-funzionali costituite dalla ceramica utilizzata per la cottura dei cibi, quella da mensa e dispensa nuda e, infine, quella rivestita e decorata. All'interno dei vari gruppi i singoli contenitori sono poi stati distinti e contati a seconda della loro forma e sono stati anche raggruppati secondo la loro funzione.

¹⁷ Lo scavo è stato recentemente oggetto di edizione critica con il catalogo completo dei reperti ceramici dal XII al XVIII secolo (Giovannini, Orecchioni, *Montecchio Vesponi*).

Il riesame dei dati fatto mettendo al centro il periodo compreso tra il tardo Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento ha fatto emergere diversi elementi utili a nuove riflessioni. Al castello di Montecchio questa è la fase del culmine insediativo del sito, attestata anche dai documenti scritti che citano ben cinquantatré abitazioni disposte in una rete molto fitta all'interno del piccolo castello. In questo periodo assistiamo all'introduzione nel corredo ceramico di alcune forme molto specializzate e sinora sconosciute come tegami forati usati per la cottura delle castagne, lastre da cottura, piattini per il contenimento di condimenti e catini per la preparazione e il lavaggio degli ingredienti. Si è notato, inoltre, l'ingresso di alcuni oggetti, come boccali e olle, già presenti nel repertorio a disposizione degli abitanti del castello ma di fattura migliore rispetto a quelli precedentemente presenti nel sito. Tali contenitori sono realizzati in nuove botteghe e arrivano al castello insieme ai primissimi esempi di ceramica decorata, ovvero i boccali in maiolica arcaica dipinti in verde e bruno su uno sfondo di smalto bianco. I confronti per questi oggetti rimandano all'ambiente produttivo della vicina città di Arezzo che, in questo periodo, sta vivendo un momento di importante espansione del suo dominio sul contado. Questo afflusso di prodotti di artigianato urbano negli insediamenti rurali, e nei castelli in particolare, non riguarda, però, la sola città di Arezzo. Si tratta infatti di un fenomeno ricorrente nella Toscana nel tardo Duecento, identificato negli studi con il termine di 'urbanesimo rurale'.¹⁸ In sintesi, in questo momento le città sembrerebbero utilizzare i siti castrali come aree di mercato per i propri prodotti, incluse le ceramiche e in particolare modo, i nuovi e più costosi contenitori dipinti da mensa, favorendo in tal modo la penetrazione e l'assimilazione dei modelli di consumo cittadini all'interno dei castelli e nel mondo rurale.¹⁹

Nonostante questo aumento nella sofisticazione del corredo, se mettiamo a confronto le ceramiche di Montecchio con quelle contemporanee di un centro urbano come Pisa o con quelle del castello di Rocca Ricciarda – che è in effetti una residenza signorile fortificata – emergono delle differenze vistose nei consumi, in special modo per quanto riguarda l'utilizzo di contenitori rivestiti. A Pisa, il materiale esaminato proviene per lo più da ambienti di bottega, quindi non si tratta di consumi d'élite. In questo periodo, inoltre, la città si trova in una fase di flessione economica a seguito della sconfitta da parte di Genova e a un conseguente restringimento dei circuiti commerciali.²⁰ Ciononostante, l'utilizzo di ceramica rivestita è molto più accentuato e vario rispetto alla realtà di Montecchio, sebbene prevalgano i prodotti realizzati localmente, come la maiolica arcaica, a discapito delle importazioni di ceramiche esotiche che in passato arrivavano dalla Tunisia, dalla Sicilia islamica e

¹⁸ Con questa accezione in Wickham, "A che serve l'incastellamento." In origine, il termine *urbanisme villageois* fu coniato da Pierre Toubert in riferimento allo sviluppo degli abitati castrali in pietra secondo un modello ad anelli concentrici (Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, 332).

¹⁹ Cantini, "Ritmi e forme."

²⁰ Figliuolo, *Alle origini del mercato*, 135-21.

dalla Spagna. A Rocca Ricciarda i reperti ceramici associabili alla prima metà del XIV secolo mostrano un modello di consumo riconducibile a stili di vita ricercati, probabilmente legati alle esigenze dei nuovi padroni della Rocca, i conti Ricasoli. Rispetto a Montecchio, infatti, il consumo di ceramiche rivestite è decisamente maggiore e, oltre alle maioliche arcaiche, sono presenti anche altri prodotti che a Montecchio arriveranno solo dopo la metà del secolo, come i boccali invetriati in verde e le pentole e i tegami invetriati. Questi ultimi sono caratterizzati da uno strato di vetrina interna che conferiva una buona anti-aderenza in cottura e quindi, pur essendo oggetti funzionali, costituiscono un tipo di strumento da cucina tecnologicamente più avanzato e sicuramente più costoso rispetto alla ceramica da fuoco grezza e nuda. Sempre a Rocca Ricciarda è stato poi possibile notare un'attestazione decisamente scarsa di boccali non decorati, che al contrario costituiscono la tipologia di contenitore di gran lunga più attestata in questo stesso periodo a Montecchio. Questo suggerisce che nella residenza signorile c'era una netta distinzione tra le ceramiche per il servizio sulla mensa e le ceramiche più semplici e non decorate confinate in dispensa e in cucina.

Nello stesso periodo, anche in Inghilterra si rileva una differenziazione importante tra i consumi registrati nei contesti urbani e in quelli rurali. I siti londinesi mostrano un'articolazione degli insiemi ceramici che appare distante anni luce dai corredi dei villaggi. Il corredo urbano include una varietà di forme e produzioni che sono totalmente sconosciute nei villaggi di Westbury e Great Linford. Qui, infatti, i contenitori in ceramica sono limitati a grandi pentole, tegami e boccali. Questi ultimi, al contrario di quelli londinesi, solo raramente appaiono abbelliti da decorazioni che, quando presenti, sono limitate a semplici motivi graffiti sulla superficie nuda del vaso, senza rivestimenti di alcun tipo.

Senza soffermarci sui risultati emersi sulla seconda metà del XIV secolo, per i quali si rimanda al volume dedicato, è qui senz'altro utile accennare al fatto che questa distanza tra consumi urbani e rurali sembra accorciarsi notevolmente dopo la metà del secolo. Ovviamente anche nella fase post-pandemica c'è una certa differenza tra i due mondi ma si nota comunque un avvicinamento importante che sembra indicare soprattutto un maggior livello di emulazione sociale da parte degli abitanti del mondo contadino.²¹ Come già detto all'inizio questo dato non deve necessariamente essere messo in relazione con una condizione economica migliore ma è comunque indicativo del fatto che gli abitanti dei contesti rurali, tanto di Westbury quanto di Montecchio, dopo la metà del secolo spendevano soldi per acquistare oggetti che prima non appartenevano al loro mondo, nonostante questi fossero già in uso in città e nei contesti signorili sin dal secolo precedente.

²¹ Orecchioni, *Dopo la peste*, 201-4; Orecchioni, "Produzione."

3. Archeologia dei regimi alimentari

Il secondo argomento che abbiamo scelto di affrontare non si concentra su un caso studio specifico o su una particolare categoria di fonti materiali, ma rappresenta una ‘riflessione archeologica’ su un tema di più ampio respiro: l'alimentazione, riconosciuta universalmente come uno degli aspetti più rilevanti per l'analisi della differenziazione economica e sociale.

Il primo passo da compiere per disegnare uno studio archeologico della disuguaglianza attraverso la lente dei regimi alimentari è quello di considerare il cibo come una manifestazione di cultura materiale che deve essere studiata nel suo contesto sociale. Anche in questo campo l'archeologia preistorica statunitense – ma anche quella anglo-sassone – mostrano una più spiccata sensibilità sull'argomento, grazie ad una assimilazione ben ragionata degli stimoli offerti dalle scienze sociali e antropologiche.²² All'interno dell'ampia gamma di studi dedicati all'indagine sul cibo come fenomeno sociale, il settore legato al tema del *luxury food* appare particolarmente stimolante per la nostra prospettiva di ricerca.²³ Con questo termine vengono identificati quegli alimenti con determinate caratteristiche di sapore, consistenza e contenuto di grassi, la cui qualità e/o quantità assumono un carattere di esclusività, consentendo di marcare le distanze sociali. Il cibo che unisce tutte queste qualità, ritenuto quello lussuoso per eccellenza, è quello più proteico, solitamente di origine animale. Le ricerche permetterebbero, infatti, di registrare una chiara preferenza verso il consumo di grassi e proteine animali nei luoghi e nelle epoche più vari. Secondo questi studi, inoltre, l'utilizzo della carne come simbolo di potere sarebbe ancora più evidente nelle situazioni di scarsità di risorse alimentari.²⁴ Anche negli studi di carattere storico-documentario che hanno affrontato il tema della dieta nel Medioevo troviamo spesso notizie di un consumo di carne regolare, talvolta eccessivo, soprattutto da parte dei ceti privilegiati. In generale, è stata notata la tendenza da parte di tutta la popolazione, appena ciò era possibile, verso un aumento dei consumi carnei. Questo ‘desiderio di carne’ sarebbe legato sia al bisogno di una dieta più sostanziosa sia all'ambizione verso il raggiungimento di un livello sociale superiore.²⁵ Il diverso accesso al cibo e la qualità degli alimenti consumati sembrerebbero fattori ancora più determinanti per il basso Medioevo; basti pensare, ad esempio, al ruolo che l'idea dell'endemica malnutrizione di una popolazione in sovrannumero ha avuto nella costruzione della visione malthusiana dell'economia medievale. Sappiamo bene, poi, che il dibattito sul Trecento è qua-

²² Twiss, *The Archaeology of Food*; Twiss, “The Archaeology of Food.”

²³ Si vedano, da ultimo, i saggi contenuti nel volume 34, fascicolo 3, anno 2000 della rivista *World Archaeology*, interamente dedicato al tema del *Luxury food*. Per una sintesi generale, si veda in particolare il saggio introduttivo della curatrice: Van der Veen, “When is food a luxury?”

²⁴ Van der Veen, 411-8.

²⁵ Mazzi, *Vita materiale*, 74; Montanari, *La fame e l'abbondanza*; Carlin, Rosenthal, *Food and Eating*.

lificato da un forte dualismo che caratterizza le due metà del secolo, in cui l'alimentazione gioca un ruolo di primo piano. Scusandoci per l'estrema semplificazione, possiamo sintetizzare dicendo che il primo cinquantennio del XIV secolo appare dominato da sovrappopolamento, carestie, malnutrizione e da monoculture destinate a nutrire una popolazione in costante crescita. In questo stesso volume, ad esempio, possiamo vedere come le fonti documentarie consentano di indagare il peso degli eventi di carestia sulla produzione agricola e sui prezzi di mercato dei generi alimentari o di vedere come le istituzioni si mossero per sostenere le necessità della popolazione in situazioni di difficoltà.²⁶ Al contrario, dopo la metà del secolo il declino demografico avrebbe garantito l'accumulo di un surplus da poter spendere in cibo e la maggiore disponibilità di terra avrebbe reso possibile un'agricoltura più differenziata lasciando, al contempo, più terreni liberi per il pascolo e l'allevamento. Questo avrebbe consentito un distacco dal regime alimentare più monotono del passato, basato principalmente su farinacei, grazie a una dieta più variata e a un consumo maggiore di carne.²⁷

Sebbene molte di queste affermazioni abbiano una validità generale, sostenuta in parte dalle evidenze documentarie, l'archeologia potrebbe fornire prove dirette di questi presunti cambiamenti sia per contesti specifici sia attraverso analisi comparative d'insieme. Di seguito vedremo come un programma strutturato di ricerca sui regimi alimentari offra, ad esempio, la possibilità di leggere direttamente sui corpi le conseguenze di una dieta carente, o al contrario, migliorata. Oggi lo studio dell'alimentazione può essere affrontato mettendo insieme una gamma di fonti archeologiche davvero ampia. L'apporto più innovativo, che negli ultimi decenni ha aumentato esponenzialmente le capacità informative delle fonti archeologiche è dato dalla possibilità di applicare un pacchetto diversificato di analisi biomolecolari sui reperti.²⁸ Il ventaglio di questioni legate al consumo del cibo che si possono affrontare con tale approccio multidisciplinare è davvero impressionante, sebbene ancora sfruttato solo in minima parte, soprattutto nell'ambito delle ricerche sul basso Medioevo.²⁹ Come vedremo, infatti, gli studi specificatamente dedicati al Trecento sono pochi ma molto promettenti. In questa fase della ricerca pensiamo, quindi, che sia fondamentale definire meglio gli obiettivi di ricerca, tentando al contempo di mettere a punto la strategia più adatta per conseguirli.

²⁶ Si vedano i contributi di Laurent Feller, Mathijs Speecke e Thijs Lambrecht, Roberta Mucciarelli, Luciano Palermo e Alexis Wilkin in questo volume.

²⁷ L'idea di una società più 'carnivora' fra il 1350 e il 1550 è già presente in Abel, *Congiuntura agraria*, 104-7 ed è stata poi ripresa, ad esempio, da Braudel, *Civiltà materiale*, 130-3 e Abulafia, "Leconomia italiana."

²⁸ Sull'impatto del cosiddetto *scientific turn* nella ricerca archeologica medievale si veda il volume 50 di *Archeologia medievale* (2024), contenente gli atti del seminario internazionale: "Scienze Dure", Storia e Archeologia del Medioevo: Verso Nuovi Paradigmi? (*British School at Rome*, Roma, 26-7 maggio, 2022) a cura di Alessandra Molinari e Chris Wickham.

²⁹ Molinari, "La congiuntura del Trecento," 11.

Un campo in cui il contributo dell'archeologia può essere davvero innovativo e significativo è quello legato alla determinazione dei regimi dietetici attraverso l'identificazione del tipo, della quantità e della qualità degli alimenti consumati. La condizione ideale per una ricostruzione fedele dei componenti della dieta di un gruppo di individui o di una comunità si presenta quando, nell'ambito di uno stesso scavo archeologico, sono disponibili insieme di ceramiche, di resti animali e vegetali e di sepolture, sebbene ciascuno di questi indicatori anche preso singolarmente abbia un grande valore informativo. Un altro requisito importante è quello cronologico; per poter leggere eventuali cambiamenti è necessario che le evidenze analizzate coprano un periodo sufficientemente ampio per mettere a confronto un prima e un dopo.

Partiamo, dunque, tornando per un momento sulla ceramica che si rivela preziosa anche in questo settore, essendo lo strumento legato alla preparazione del cibo che si conserva meglio e in maggiori quantità. Un'attenta valutazione della forma dei contenitori impiegati in cucina può suggerire la natura degli alimenti cucinati al loro interno. Ad esempio, piatti ampi e con pareti molto basse si prestano bene alla preparazione di pani e focacce mentre le pentole grandi e capienti sono adatte per la cottura di zuppe e brodi. Queste supposizioni possono essere confermate, almeno in parte, dall'analisi dei contenuti organici.³⁰ La ceramica è un materiale poroso che assorbe e imprigiona le sostanze con cui entra a contatto per cui, attraverso una serie di procedure, è possibile estrarre tali sostanze dalle pareti delle pentole per esaminare la loro composizione chimica. L'analisi in laboratorio di queste tracce consente di identificare un'ampia varietà di alimenti.³¹ È possibile, ad esempio, riconoscere la presenza di grassi di origine animale, distinguendo anche tra animali erbivori e onnivori o tra animali terrestri e acquatici. Si possono identificare grassi vegetali come l'olio d'oliva e persino distinguere latte e derivati (formaggi).³² Con il progredire della analisi si stanno caratterizzando in maniera sempre più precisa anche le tracce di vino e tutta una serie di frutti, cereali e ortaggi.³³ La possibilità di applicare queste analisi a ceramica da fuoco provenienti da contesti basso medievali ben datati, potrebbe aiutare a capire se la prima metà del secolo fosse effettivamente caratterizzata da una dieta più monotona e meno proteica o se le forme specializzate via via introdotte nella strumentazione domestica fossero effettivamente dedicate alla cottura di specifiche pietanze e così via.

Un'altra fonte fondamentale per la ricostruzione della dieta, in particolare della porzione proteica, è costituita, ovviamente, dai resti faunistici. I frammenti di ossa animali che rinveniamo negli scavi sono principalmente il risultato dello scarto delle fasi di preparazione e di consumo dei pasti. Oltre

³⁰ Pecci, "Analisi funzionale."

³¹ Evershed, "Organic residues."

³² Dudd, Evershed, "Direct demonstration of milk."

³³ Hammann, Cramp, "Towards the detection;" Lundy *et al.*, "New insights," 11-5; Lundy *et al.* "Cuisine in transition."

agli aspetti più classici che riguardano l'identificazione e la quantificazione degli animali presenti in un record archeologico, un programma di studio mirato dovrebbe includere specifiche analisi volte alla lettura delle differenze nei consumi.³⁴ Ad esempio, si possono prendere in considerazione l'età di macellazione, la presenza di diversi tagli e la loro distribuzione all'interno di un insediamento, di una città o di un villaggio. Una maggiore o minore disponibilità economica può infatti incidere sulla scelta; ad esempio, con un aumentato potere d'acquisto ci si potrebbe aspettare il consumo di animali di età più giovane, con carni più tenere e viceversa. Dinamiche simili, ad esempio sono state notate al castello di Montarrenti dove è stata registrata una distribuzione dei tagli nettamente migliore e una età di macellazione più giovane nei resti recuperati nella zona signorile rispetto a quelli del sottostante villaggio.³⁵ Anche a Rocca Ricciarda la giovane età degli animali consumati è stata considerata un segno forte di differenziazione sociale rispetto ai consumi medi della popolazione contadina.³⁶ La presenza di ossa associate a carni giovani o vecchie, di buona o mediocre qualità può quindi essere indicativa della condizione dell'insediamento o di una singola unità familiare all'interno di esso e uno studio diacronico e comparativo tra più siti sarebbe fondamentale per definire gli eventuali cambiamenti in atto nel corso del Trecento.

Infine, gli elementi vegetali della dieta, oltre che con i residui organici possono essere individuati grazie agli studi archeobotanici. In particolare, i carporesti (l'insieme di semi, frutti, parti dell'infiorescenza) sono quelli che forniscono le informazioni più dettagliate sulle piante utilizzate nell'alimentazione e sui processi di trasformazione e di produzione degli alimenti.

Non solo il tipo di cibo consumato ma anche il processo di trasformazione degli ingredienti e le pratiche culinarie possono avere una connotazione sociale e devono dunque essere tenute in maggiore considerazione. Il modo di cucinare un alimento può arricchire o abbassare il suo apporto nutrizionale ma può anche migliorarne il sapore, conferendo maggiore prestigio alla pietanza e alle persone che la consumano. La fase di preparazione è più complessa da indagare ma, anche in questo caso, mettendo insieme più fonti si possono cogliere diversi aspetti dei modi e delle mode in cucina.³⁷ Ad esempio, lo studio del vasellame da fuoco dei siti inglesi, cui sui è già accennato in precedenza, ha fatto emergere la diffusione di una serie di forme molto specializzate pensate appositamente per la cottura arrosto della carne. Il *dripping dish* è una sorta di vassoio con versatoio che veniva posto sotto lo spiedo o sotto le griglie per raccogliere i sughi di cottura delle carni mentre il *pipkin* è un piccolo pentolino con manico talvolta provvisto di treppiede che si pensa fosse utilizzato per creare e servire a tavola le salse d'accompagnamento, le

³⁴ Reitz, "Vertebrate fauna;" Eryvneck, Van Neer, Hüster-Plogmann, Schibler, "Beyond affluence."

³⁵ Clark, "The mammal bone," 192-8.

³⁶ Corbino, "I reperti faunistici," 323.

³⁷ Graff, "Archaeological Studies of Cooking."

famose *gravies* inglesi. Questi strumenti sono attestati nei siti urbani londinesi nel tardo Duecento ma si diffondono sempre di più dopo la metà del XIV secolo, quando iniziano ad arrivare anche nei villaggi rurali. Qui nel periodo precedente – compreso tra la metà del XIII e la metà del XIV secolo – le uniche pentole presenti erano quelle più grandi e larghe, solitamente associate a un consumo di carni in umido come zuppe o bolliti dove si mettevano tagli meno pregiati, più vecchi o addirittura scarti delle ossa. Sembrerebbe, dunque che l'introduzione di strumenti appositamente pensati per la cottura arrosto possa essere considerato un segnale di un consumo di carne di qualità superiore.³⁸

Anche i resti faunistici conservano le tracce di modi di preparazione. Esistono tutta una serie di studi sperimentali sulle tecniche di macellazione, sulla bollitura e l'arrosto di carne animale con l'osso o su questioni specifiche come l'estrazione del midollo. Ad esempio, il modo in cui un animale viene disarticolato e sporzionato varia a seconda che il macellaio voglia ricavare tagli da arrostiti, da bollire o da conservare essiccati. Anche la tecnica di cottura sembrerebbe lasciare segni diversi e identificabili sulle ossa; la cottura arrosto sembrerebbe infatti incidere in maniera diversa, rispetto alla bollitura, sulla struttura, sulla friabilità e sul colore delle ossa.³⁹

Per illustrare concretamente la varietà di informazioni che è possibile ottenere sulla dieta attraverso l'integrazione di diverse fonti, presentiamo brevemente un recente progetto di ricerca – a cui abbiamo direttamente partecipato – dedicato allo studio delle transizioni tra le fasi bizantina, islamica e normanno-sveva in Sicilia.⁴⁰ In questo contesto, l'analisi delle pratiche alimentari ha rappresentato un elemento chiave per comprendere i cambiamenti socio-culturali avvenuti nel corso del Medioevo. I risultati ottenuti derivano da un approccio multidisciplinare che ha combinato l'analisi qualitativa e quantitativa dell'intero repertorio ceramico con le indagini sui residui organici, basate sull'estrazione dei lipidi e sull'analisi isotopica, oltre agli studi archeologici sui materiali faunistici e archeobotanici. Senza entrare nel dettaglio di tutte le questioni emerse, ci limiteremo qui a evidenziare alcuni risultati significativi, che hanno permesso di individuare differenze nei modelli di consumo tra vari contesti e periodi storici, rimandando, per un'analisi dettagliata, alle numerose pubblicazioni prodotte negli ultimi anni nell'ambito di questo progetto.⁴¹

³⁸ Orecchioni, *Dopo la peste*, 197-204.

³⁹ Monton, "Cooking in zooarchaeology."

⁴⁰ Il progetto di ricerca quinquennale dal titolo "Sicily in Transition: The Archaeology of Regime Change" è stato finanziato dallo European Research Council (SicTransit, ERC Advanced Grant, 2014-22, no. 693600: <https://sicily-in-transition.org/>) e ha previsto la collaborazione delle università di York, Roma Tor Vergata e del Salento.

⁴¹ Gli scavi che costituiscono il fulcro del progetto sono quello in via tenente Gaspare Romano di Mazara del Vallo (TP) e quelli dell'area di Castronovo di Sicilia (PA), entrambi recentemente oggetto di edizione critica completa: Carver, Molinari, Orecchioni, *Castronovo di Sicilia*; Molinari, Meo, *Mazara/ Māzar*. I volumi includono saggi su tutte le categorie di reperti e sulle

L'analisi di residui organici ha permesso di individuare specificità nell'uso di alcuni contenitori, evidenziando differenze funzionali legate alle pratiche alimentari. Alcune forme aperte, ad esempio, sembrerebbero destinate esclusivamente alla cottura di carni arrosto, mentre in generale nelle forme chiuse è stato possibile riconoscere un maggiore mix di ingredienti. Di particolare interesse è il caso delle marmitte modellate a mano, l'unico tipo di pentola di tradizione islamica che, in alcuni contesti, continua a essere utilizzato fino al XIII secolo avanzato. Le analisi hanno evidenziato che tali contenitori sia nel periodo islamico sia in quello svevo risultano impiegati principalmente per la cottura di grassi derivati da ruminanti, spesso in associazione con frutta e vegetali. Questo dato sembrerebbe suggerire la persistenza lungo i secoli di ricette legate a quello specifico contenitore, che escludevano il consumo di carne suina, anche nel momento in cui i maiali risultano ampiamente diffusi negli assemblaggi faunistici.⁴² Nei contesti rurali, è stata rilevata la presenza di contenitori dedicati alla lavorazione dei formaggi, che risultano invece assenti nei centri urbani come Palermo e Mazara, dove il formaggio poteva, probabilmente, essere acquistato nelle botteghe. L'analisi dei residui ha anche registrato la probabile introduzione del vino nelle preparazioni culinarie del XIII secolo e ha evidenziato un maggiore impiego di prodotti derivati della frutta nei contesti urbani, dove forse si preferiva una cucina più elaborata e sofisticata rispetto a quella rurale.⁴³

L'integrazione con il dato archeobotanico ha permesso di arricchire ulteriormente il quadro sul consumo di frutta, ortaggi e cereali. Richiamiamo, nello specifico, il caso particolarmente fortunato dei contesti di Mazara del Vallo dove, all'interno di silos, pozzi e latrine, sono stati recuperati i resti derivati dalla lavorazione e preparazione del cibo, oltre alle tracce dirette di componenti vegetali consumate e smaltite durante le diverse fasi di occupazione del sito, dal IX al XIV secolo. In particolare, la fase islamica si distingue la più ampia varietà di frutta e verdura consumata, che include frutti da albero, tra cui prugne/prunelle, pesche, pere/mele, fichi, sorbe, agrumi, nocciole, melagrane e piante da orto come melanzane e angurie. Tra XI e tardo XIII secolo si è registrato un consumo di cereali di diverse qualità (orzi, grano duro, grano tenero, farro, farricello, segale) con una preferenza per gli orzi nella fase islamica e un maggiore consumo di grano duro e tenero nel successivo periodo svevo/angioino. A questa varietà si contrappone, significativamente, la monotonia della successiva fase aragonese (XIV secolo) contraddistinta da una restrizione dei cereali consumati, apparentemente limitati ad alcune varietà di orzo.⁴⁴

analisi scientifiche condotte sui reperti di scavo e i riferimenti bibliografici a tutti gli articoli scientifici pubblicati nelle riviste di settore.

⁴² Per il consumo di carne suina in Sicilia nel Medioevo si veda Aniceti, Albarella, "Who's eating pork?"

⁴³ Per una sintesi ragionata sui risultati dello studio integrato dei contenitori ceramici si rinvia al saggio di imminente pubblicazione: Meo, Orecchioni, "Cosa bolle."

⁴⁴ Fiorentino *et al.*, "Mazara tra innovazione."

Gli indizi di un accesso diversificato al cibo possono poi conservarsi direttamente all'interno delle ossa degli individui sepolti. La lettura di tale variabilità avviene per mezzo delle analisi degli isotopi stabili, che permettono di misurare la quantità di alcuni elementi presenti nel collagene delle ossa umane, come l'azoto e il carbonio, la cui presenza nelle ossa varia a seconda del tipo di nutrizione prevalente (verdure, carne o pesce).⁴⁵ Mettendo a confronto gli individui di una data popolazione sepolta, l'analisi isotopica può rivelare diete relativamente simili o mettere in risalto livelli di variabilità interindividuale. I risultati possono essere ancora più precisi se correlarli ad altri indicatori forniti dallo studio antropologico e paleopatologico degli inumati. Lo stato generale della salute di una persona e il corretto sviluppo delle ossa e dell'individuo sono, infatti, strettamente legati al giusto apporto nutrizionale soprattutto nelle fasi di crescita.⁴⁶

Anche in questo caso per contestualizzare e rendere più immediata la comprensione del potenziale di tale approccio investigativo riportiamo alcuni recenti casi di studio sul basso medioevo portati avanti in Francia e in Inghilterra con lo scopo di valutare l'impatto della Peste Nera (1347-52) sulle abitudini alimentari e sullo stato di salute delle popolazioni dell'epoca. Molto interessanti, i risultati di una ricerca condotta su quarantasei individui sepolti nel cimitero di Saint-Laurent in Grenoble tra il XIII e l'inizio del XVI secolo.⁴⁷ Gli inumati analizzati provenivano dal chiostro, riservato alle sepolture dei monaci, e dal cimitero esterno, destinato alla comunità del luogo. Le analisi isotopiche hanno evidenziato un'alimentazione più proteica per i monaci rispetto agli abitanti del villaggio e anche un maggiore consumo di carne da parte degli uomini rispetto alle donne. Suddividendo i dati secondo tre scansioni cronologiche di un secolo ciascuna è stato poi possibile notare un generico incremento nel consumo di proteine animali nel XIV secolo, ancora più accentuato nel XV secolo. Le analisi antropologiche hanno poi riconosciuto i segni di un crescente benessere, testimoniato dall'aumento dell'altezza e del dimorfismo sessuale (la differenza nello sviluppo delle ossa tra maschi e femmine) degli individui analizzati.⁴⁸

Un secondo studio di recentissima pubblicazione, sempre su territorio francese, è stato condotto su un corpus di 172 campioni ossei provenienti da vari siti cimiteriali medievali di Tolosa. I campioni esaminati includevano resti di vittime dell'epidemia del 1348 (no.=47), oltre a quelli di individui morti prima (1330-4, no.=69) e dopo la crisi sanitaria (1380-1545, no.=56). L'analisi non ha evidenziato differenze significative tra le firme isotopiche dei soggetti

⁴⁵ Tykot, "Stable Isotopes and diet."

⁴⁶ Quinn, Beck, "Essential Tensions."

⁴⁷ Herrscher, "Inferring diet."

⁴⁸ Negli studi scientifici un dimorfismo più marcato è solitamente associato a condizioni di vita migliori sia dal punto di vista nutrizionale che economico, e viene connesso ad un maggiore consumo di cibo contenente glucosio e proteine animali e al consumo di pane più raffinato. Si veda, ad esempio, German, Hochberg, "Sexual Dimorphism."

deceduti prima e durante la Peste Nera, suggerendo un regime alimentare sostanzialmente invariato tra i due gruppi. Tuttavia, i dati relativi agli individui morti dopo l'epidemia indicano un aumento dei valori di carbonio e azoto, segnale di una progressiva diversificazione della dieta. Questo cambiamento sembra essere associato a un incremento nel consumo di proteine di origine animale, sia terrestre che marina, e possibilmente all'introduzione di piante C4 nell'alimentazione (canna da zucchero, sorgo, miglio, ecc.). Un aspetto particolarmente rilevante riguarda le differenze di genere nell'accesso alle risorse alimentari. L'aumento dei valori di azoto è risultato più marcato nei soggetti femminili, il cui apporto proteico, inferiore rispetto a quello maschile prima dell'epidemia, si è avvicinato a quest'ultimo dopo la crisi. Questo dato potrebbe suggerire una riduzione delle disuguaglianze nutrizionali tra uomini e donne nel periodo successivo alla Peste Nera.⁴⁹

Il terzo lavoro che segnaliamo, ancora in corso, è basato sulle evidenze di oltre seicento individui inumati in diversi cimiteri di Londra tra il XII e il XVI secolo. Al momento sono stati prodotti soprattutto lavori di antropologia e paleopatologia ma in questi anni il progetto è stato rifinanziato e quindi a breve i dati saranno integrati con le analisi degli isotopi. I risultati riportati nei lavori pubblicati sino ad ora sembrerebbero indicare un aumento nelle aspettative di vita, un calo nel rischio di mortalità e un miglioramento delle condizioni di salute nelle generazioni successive alle epidemie di peste del 1348. Si dice anche che la mortalità della peste sembrerebbe essere stata incrementata dai deficit nutrizionali rilevati nel periodo antecedente agli episodi epidemici dovuti a un inasprimento dalle disuguaglianze sociali. Al momento, si sta cercando di stabilire se lo stato di salute migliorò perché la peste aveva eliminato gli elementi più deboli o perché ci furono effettivamente dei miglioramenti nella dieta e negli standard di vita.⁵⁰

Infine, segnaliamo un ultimo caso studio che sembrerebbe aver raggiunto risultati in parte differenti. Per esplorare come le condizioni storiche influenzano la salute della popolazione e come la salute cambia la storia, il progetto *After the Plague* sta attualmente analizzando circa 1.000 scheletri provenienti dal cimitero dell'Hospital of St. John a Cambridge e da altri siti medievali della città. L'approccio multidisciplinare prevede un'ampia varietà di analisi che includono studi genomici, osteologici paleopatologici ecc. Per analizzare la dieta della popolazione medievale, sono state condotte analisi degli isotopi di carbonio e azoto su 314 frammenti ossei e 227 denti, appartenenti per lo più ad adulti. I risultati indicano che la popolazione di Cambridge seguiva una dieta onnivora, con proteine animali e vegetali (grano, orzo, segale e piselli). Alcuni individui, in particolare monaci e ospiti dell'ospedale, consumavano regolarmente pesce marino, in linea con le restrizioni religiose

⁴⁹ Kacki *et al.*, "Répercussions de la Peste."

⁵⁰ DeWitte, "Stress, sex, and plague;" DeWitte, Beaumont, Montgomery, Redfern, "Dietary variation."

e la crescente disponibilità di pesce dovuta al progresso delle tecniche di pesca. Si sono inoltre riscontrate differenze dietetiche tra i vari siti medievali di Cambridge: il convento agostiniano mostrava i valori isotopici più alti, l'ospedale aveva la gamma più ampia, mentre il sito rurale di Cherry Hinton aveva valori leggermente inferiori, suggerendo una possibile influenza dello status sociale sulla dieta. Inoltre, si sono notate differenze alimentari tra uomini e donne, con gli uomini che presentavano una maggiore variabilità nel consumo di proteine animali e marine. L'analisi isotopica non ha evidenziato cambiamenti significativi nella dieta dopo la Peste Nera o tra il XIII e il XV secolo, anche se una maggiore variabilità nei periodi più recenti potrebbe riflettere una crescente diversificazione sociale nel consumo di cibo.⁵¹ Nel complesso, gli studi riportati sembrerebbero evidenziare significative trasformazioni nei modelli alimentari medievali, sollevando interrogativi di rilievo sulle conseguenze socio-economiche dell'epidemia, in particolare per quanto riguarda l'accesso alle risorse alimentari in base al genere e al contesto di appartenenza, con apparenti distinzioni tra ambienti rurali e urbani.

Per concludere facciamo un breve accenno a un altro fattore centrale per la comprensione dell'evoluzione delle pratiche alimentari, ovvero la questione climatica. Il tema è decisamente attuale. Gli elementi critici che caratterizzano la prima fase del Trecento, ovvero gli episodi ricorrenti di fenomeni climatici avversi, la crescita demografica e l'insicurezza alimentare non sembrano poi distanti dalle sfide che stiamo affrontando oggi. In questo contesto l'archeologia, attraverso lo studio delle interazioni uomo-ambiente può contribuire alla comprensione del passato e, allo stesso tempo, alla ricerca di soluzioni per far fronte alle sfide odierne. Le pratiche sostenibili oggi raccomandate per affrontare la carenza di risorse e il cambiamento climatico richiamano in parte gli eventi che si suppone abbiano caratterizzato la fase post pandemica, ovvero la diminuzione delle monoculture ad alto input (i cereali) per un ritorno a una multi-varietà a resa inferiore, combinati con pratiche diversificate di coltivazione e utilizzo del territorio. Le ricerche paleo-ambientali condotte negli ultimi anni, portate avanti attraverso una sinergia tra l'archeologia del paesaggio agrario, l'archeobotanica e lo studio delle serie polliniche costituiscono un esempio dei risultati che è possibile ottenere in questo campo.⁵²

⁵¹ Al momento le pubblicazioni prodotte nell'ambito del progetto sono per lo più dedicate agli studi genetici dell'aDNA, mentre lo studio isotopico dei regimi alimentari è ancora in corso: una buona sintesi dei risultati è disponibile nel sito dedicato al progetto, insieme a tutti gli articoli prodotti e in corso di stampa: <https://www.aftertheplague.org/>.

⁵² Bogaard, "The Archaeology of food;" Izdebski *et al.*, "L'émergence d'une histoire." Per un caso di studio interdisciplinare condotto in Italia per il periodo bassomedievale, si veda Arthur *et al.* "Crisi o resilienza."

4. Considerazioni di sintesi

In queste poche pagine abbiamo scelto di affrontare il tema dei consumi ceramici e della dieta per ragionare concretamente sulle fonti e sui metodi attraverso i quali l'archeologia potrebbe produrre risultati efficaci e alternativi sul tema delle disuguaglianze economiche e sociali. Lo spazio limitato ci ha imposto di soffermarci su poche, seppur fondamentali, questioni ma ci sono molte altre strade percorribili che includono ad esempio, l'evoluzione dell'edilizia abitativa e pubblica⁵³ o i modi di consumo di categorie di oggetti diversi dalle ceramiche, come gli oggetti in metallo e vetro. Abbiamo poi privilegiato un'analisi della dimensione più materiale della differenziazione ma siamo consapevoli che in futuro, occorrerà lavorare anche sulle manifestazioni di disuguaglianza più impercettibili a livello materiale come il potere politico e l'azione in società, questioni decisamente più complesse ma non impossibili da indagare anche da un punto di vista archeologico.⁵⁴

Il prossimo passo, dunque, spetta a noi archeologi, che siamo invitati a cogliere e mettere a frutto le possibilità offerte dall'imponente massa di dati che si sta raccogliendo in questo momento, grazie anche alle nuove metodologie di ricerca e di analisi. Per affrontare queste tematiche in modo efficace, sarà fondamentale una pianificazione accurata dei progetti di ricerca, che dovranno necessariamente adottare un approccio multidisciplinare. Le scienze sperimentali, infatti, non solo generano nuovi dati e offrono l'opportunità di riconsiderare quelli esistenti, ma permettono anche di riformulare le domande storiche da una prospettiva innovativa, ampliando esponenzialmente le possibilità di interpretazione. Affinché un progetto sia realmente strutturato in modo solido, l'interdisciplinarietà dovrà essere integrata fin dalle fasi iniziali, influenzando la definizione degli obiettivi, la selezione delle fonti – siano esse archivi naturali, reperti archeologici o documenti storici – e la scelta delle analisi da condurre. Infine, l'interpretazione dei dati dovrà essere condotta con rigore, considerando le connessioni tra le diverse discipline per ottenere una visione più completa e approfondita dei fenomeni che si vogliono analizzare. Il secondo *step* dovrà essere compiuto insieme da storici e archeologi. Questi ultimi dovranno riuscire a comunicare i risultati della ricerca attraverso nuovi canali e a un pubblico più ampio, che dovrà necessariamente inclu-

⁵³ Su questo tema, ad esempio, sono state estremamente stimolanti le riflessioni di Gabriella Piccinini (in questo volume) che ci spingono ad approfondire attraverso i metodi dell'archeologia dell'architettura il racconto ricavato dall'esame delle fonti documentarie. Per una breve riflessione in merito alle dinamiche evolutive dell'edilizia trecentesca si rimanda a Orecchioni, *Dopo la peste*, 204-7. Segnaliamo, inoltre, un recente progetto di ricerca finanziato dallo European Research Council dal titolo *Petrifying Wealth, The Southern European Shift to Masonry as Collective Investment in Identity, c. 1050-1300 (Petrifying Wealth, ERC Advanced Grant, 2017-23, no. 695515: <https://www.petrifyingwealth.eu/>)* che vede la partecipazione congiunta di storici e archeologici per l'analisi dell'evoluzione dell'edilizia tra X e XIII secolo e i cui principali risultati sono consultabili online.

⁵⁴ Beck, Quinn, "Balancing the scales," 6-9.

dere gli storici delle fonti scritte. Da parte loro, questi ultimi dovranno essere pronti ad accogliere e elaborare criticamente le nuove acquisizioni all'interno delle proprie ricostruzioni.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Su questo tema si rimanda alle riflessioni in Molinari, "Scienze dure, storia."

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Wealth inequality and land ownership before and after the Black Death.

A quantitative analysis of peasant probate inventories from the Kingdom of Valencia (1283-1400)

by Luis Almenar Fernández

L'articolo analizza la proprietà della terra dei contadini del regno di Valencia per studiare le disuguaglianze nella distribuzione della ricchezza all'interno di questo gruppo. Analizzando un campione di 191 inventari di successione dal 1283 al 1400, si apportano nuove evidenze sul numero di appezzamenti posseduti dai contadini, sulla dimensione delle loro proprietà e delle relative coltivazioni. Tutto ciò offre un'opportunità unica per studiare le disuguaglianze in un periodo per il quale non sono sopravvissuti registri fiscali. L'analisi sostiene che prima della Peste Nera si potevano osservare importanti disuguaglianze tra i contadini in tutto il regno di Valencia, disuguaglianze che però sembrano aumentare nel mezzo secolo successivo alla Peste per quanto riguarda la proprietà della terra.

This article examines land ownership among Valencian peasants as a means of addressing internal wealth inequalities. Using a sample of 191 probate inventories from 1283 to 1400, we provide evidence of the number of plots owned by peasants, the size of their holdings, and the crops they grew. This provides a unique opportunity to explore inequalities in a period for which no tax records have survived. The study argues that before the Black Death there were significant inequalities among Valencian peasants across the kingdom, which appear to have increased in the fifty years after the plague in terms of land ownership.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, regno di Valencia, contadini, proprietà fondiaria, disuguaglianza della ricchezza, inventari post-mortem.

Keywords: Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Kingdom of Valencia, peasantry, land ownership, wealth inequality, probate inventories.

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1. Introduction

Scholarship acknowledges that the arrival of the first wave of the Black Death in Europe (1348) had a serious impact on wealth distribution.¹ The pandemic reached most areas of the continent in a context of high population and low real wages, as a result of the extensive economic growth that had been developing in the central Middle Ages. The impact of mortality led to an inverse condition of low population and high real wages around the continent. How this situation developed locally and its effects in the long run are still the subject of debate, but it seems clear that, when it comes to the general dynamics of inequality between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, a European pattern existed: a sustained trend towards more unequal wealth distribution, being interrupted –and reversed – by the Black Death and its aftermath for several decades.²

Historians who have studied inequality in Iberia seem to be divided as to how far the peninsula followed this European trend. Economic historians basing themselves on econometrics seem to be in favour of more ‘exceptionalist’ positions, arguing that Iberia would not have experienced a decrease in inequality immediately after the plague, but a rise in it and a fall in real wages. It is contended that this would have been a result of the scarcity of population and the abundance of resources that was characteristic of ‘frontier economies’ in the period.³ Meanwhile, medieval historians relying on tax records and other contemporary sources have tended more to ‘standardist’ interpretations, stressing that Iberia would generally have followed the ‘standard’ trend that is detected elsewhere in Europe despite local differences.⁴ The devil, of course, is in the details, and very recently Guido Alfani has noted that the evidence provided by both groups of Spanish scholars could be compatible when studying the data more closely. At the very least, both positions would be reconcilable at some stages of the situation in the period. Particularly when it comes to Spain, a “period of decline in income inequality started in the late

¹ This paper is part of the research projects “Mercados, instituciones e integración económica en el Mediterráneo occidental (siglos XIII-XVI)” (PID2021-128038NB-I00) and “Pacto, negociación y conflicto en la cultura política castellana” (PID2020-113794GB-I00), based at the University of Valencia and Complutense University of Madrid, both of them awarded by the Spanish Government (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación). This paper is also part of the Generalitat Valenciana project “Rompiendo jerarquías. Movilidad social, dinamismo económico y desarrollo institucional en la Europa Mediterránea (siglos XIII-XVI)” (Prometeo CIPROM/2022/46). Abbreviations: AHN (Archivo Histórico Nacional); AMV (Arxiu Municipal de València); APCCV (Arxiu de Protocols del Corpus Christi de València); ARV (Arxiu del Regne de València).

² See review in Alfani, “Epidemics, Inequality, and Poverty,” as well as Scheidel, *The Great Leveler*.

³ Álvarez-Nogal, Prados, Santiago-Caballero, “Economic Effects of the Black Death;” Álvarez-Nogal, Prados, “The rise and fall.”

⁴ Furió *et al.*, “Measuring economic inequality;” Almenar, Chismol, Ruiz, “Aproximación a la desigualdad económica;” Furió, “Economic Inequality in Iberia.”

fourteenth century and continued until circa 1430, after which the growth of inequality resumed”.⁵

The current state of the art on inequality in late medieval Iberia is symptomatic of the need for further data and research. The need for more evidence for particularly remote periods – like the first half of the fourteenth century – is clearly urgent. Tax registries recording direct taxation are of course the most canonical and ideal sources that have been employed for this purpose. Their preservation in Iberia in the late medieval context proves to be nearly as abundant as in Italy, particularly in the areas of the old Crown of Aragon (the principality of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia). Many of these, and particularly those from the kingdom of Valencia, have been explored in recent years and have helped to construct much of this discussion.⁶ However, the problem of preservation remains, for extant tax records are rare from the period before the Black Death. This is why alternative sources could be important as a means of contributing to this scholarship, such as dowries, marriage contracts or, as we intend here, probate inventories.

The contribution of this study to this field of enquiry consists of the analysis of land ownership among the Valencian peasantry during this key moment of socioeconomic changes and shifts in the dynamics of inequality. This will be undertaken through a quantitative analysis of probate inventories of Valencian peasants who died between 1283 and 1400. The interest of this approach relies on three aspects: the object (land ownership), the subject (peasants) and the source (inventories).

Firstly, land was a basic part of medieval peasants’ wealth, as well as a production good in itself. This was particularly important in the kingdom of Valencia, where small peasant holdings with optimal conditions for tenants were mostly the norm. As will be explained later, Valencian peasants had a lot of room for decision-making and the commercialization of their agrarian produce. Moreover, land distribution and ownership were extremely sensitive to the demographic impact of the plague. As in other European scenarios, the Valencian system of inheritance involved the equal distribution of land among surviving heirs.⁷ The sudden death of a huge number of owners led to the fragmentation and re-composition of holdings. In fact, and despite very local disparity and often fragmented data, a process of increasing land ownership seems to be detected a couple of generations after the Black Death in various European areas, such as Brabant, Flanders, Normandy and Brandenburg.⁸ In what has been called a “buyer-friendly” market, with an abundant supply

⁵ Alfani, “Epidemics, Inequality, and Poverty,” 16.

⁶ See Furió *et al.*, “Measuring economic inequality,” 171-2.

⁷ Furió, García-Oliver, “Household, peasant holding and labour relations.”

⁸ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 81-2, by compiling data from: Genicot, *Comunidades rurales*, Bois, *Crise du féodalisme*, and Rösener, *Los campesinos en la Edad Media*.

of land and high real wages,⁹ peasants could purchase additional plots in an active land market to increase their holdings.

The second area of interest in this research is the peasants themselves. Most scholarship on inequality relies on regional, national or trans-national data, often very long term, not paying much attention to specific social strata. While this information proves to be of paramount importance, it is our conviction that 'zoom-in' approaches to specific echelons of society should not be overlooked. By analysing peasants, who made up the bulk of medieval society, we address inequality from a more social angle that can be related to other historical phenomena that specifically affected this group.

Thirdly, the extant number of probate inventories from Valencia is a final strength that must be noted. Tax records from the kingdom of Valencia do not survive for the first half of the fourteenth century. The fourteenth-century specimens studied earlier correspond to a period after the plague, and most surviving tax records were written in the fifteenth century.¹⁰ Probate inventories, however, survive in Valencia from the late thirteenth century, also recording deceased peasants' possessions.¹¹ These sources have been used in recent years to look at changes in consumption and material culture from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.¹² However, medieval economic historians have not studied these sources much when analysing land ownership, something that has been more popular for subsequent periods in other areas of Iberia and Europe.¹³

Valencian inventories record the goods of deceased individuals, and such documents are abundantly present in notarial records. These lists were ordered by heirs who wanted to secure the transmission of the deceased's possessions, sometimes to avoid unwanted indebtedness. Inventories were imposed by law when heirs were minors, leading tutors to necessarily ask for these lists to be made.¹⁴ These documents are exhaustive and descriptive, and as well as everyday objects they provide references to plots of land, with

⁹ Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality, and Poverty;" Alfani, "The Effects of Plague on the Distribution of Property."

¹⁰ Furió, "Avant le cadastre."

¹¹ Almenar, "Los inventarios post-mortem;" Almenar, "La cultura material de la alimentación campesina;" Almenar, "Why did medieval villagers buy earthenware?"

¹² Almenar, Belenguer, "The transformation of private space;" Almenar, "La cultura material de la alimentación campesina." Almenar, "Why did medieval villagers buy earthenware?" For a recent inter-disciplinary set of contributions see: García Marsilla, *Espacios de vida*.

¹³ Moreno, "Els inventaris post mortem Catalans a l'època moderna," 45-7; Congost, Ros, "Els inventaris de la gent humil," 83-4. Early modern English inventories, perhaps the most studied quantitatively for a number of purposes, do not record real estates, but documents recording land, which help to approach land ownership in combination with probate accounts and wills (Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, 14). See other classic work on agrarian change based on inventories in Overton, "English probate inventories and the measurement of agricultural change" and Overton, "Probate inventories and the reconstruction of agrarian landscapes." The possibilities of these sources for studying agricultural change were already addressed in the first methodological book on inventories, by Van der Woude, Schuurman, *Probate inventories*.

¹⁴ Almenar, "Los inventarios post-mortem." See also Riello, "Things seen and unseen."

occasional acreages and crop types. All of that can be used to explore agrarian structures and land ownership inequality in the fourteenth century, in the years immediately before and after the Black Death.¹⁵

The sample analysed in this article consists of 191 inventories, which will be approached in two 'artificial' periods – 115 from 1283 to 1350, and 76 from 1351 to 1400. These documents come from a variety of Valencian archives from across the realm and refer to rural communities, or to peasants living in medium-sized or large towns.¹⁶ Those written by 1350 are virtually all surviving inventories, while the rest have resulted from selections of notaries whose clientele was focused on craftsmen and peasants. Although the size of the sample is arguably small compared to other historical periods, the relative abundance must be noted of this set of documents for a period from which there are normally no extant specimens in most of Europe.

2. Land ownership and landlessness

The predominant agrarian unit of labour in the kingdom of Valencia was the small peasant holding. These were present on both seigniorial and royal land. Small peasant holdings normally consisted of scattered plots of land in various municipal territories. Farmsteads on irrigated land (*alqueries*) or mountainous dryland (*masos*) were often provided with larger compact holdings. Yet this was not particularly common in the kingdom of Valencia. Here, as in other regions of Eastern Iberia, for instance in the south of the principality of Catalonia (the so-called *Catalunya Nova*), the dynamics of the conquests from the Muslims during the thirteenth century led to the proliferation of this type of holding that was highly beneficial for peasant families. It was a political strategy to attract migrants from the places of origin of the Christian conquerors, who were essential for the creation of the new feudal societies.¹⁷

In juridical terms, most households managed their land under the legal figure of emphyteutic tenure (*enfiteusi*), which effectively implied absolute decision-making as to crop types, purchase and sale of land and other business. Valencian peasants could thus do as they wished with their holdings as

¹⁵ This method could be approached with other fourteenth-century inventories of the Mediterranean. Italian inventories from the fifteenth century, at least, could also be potentially analysed to explore land ownership. See: Mazzi, Raveggi, *Gli uomini e le cose*, 323-408.

¹⁶ The populations under analysis in this article will be clustered into five categories corresponding to areas or locations of the realm: 'Morvedre' (the town of this name and its hinterland), 'North' (Vilafranca, Morella and their rural hinterland), 'Centre-South' (the regions of La Safor, La Ribera and l'Alcoià), 'Valencia city' (the capital of the kingdom) and, finally, 'Valencia hinterland' (historically known as *horta*, meaning its surrounding villages and farmsteads). The validity of the sample is addressed in-depth in Almenar, 'La cultura material de la alimentación campesina,' 54-78.

¹⁷ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 160-1.

tenants and vassals, while their lords – whether nobles or the king – retained two basic rights: on the one hand, priority in the purchasing of real estates of vassals (*fadiga*); on the other hand, a fine on land transactions (*lluïsmes*, called *lods-et-ventes* in French), consisting of a percentage of the sale price that was paid to the lord (normally 10%). Most Valencian peasants held their holdings by way of emphyteutic tenure, while other tenancies were allodial (*alous*) and therefore held in full ownership. Therefore, the peasants of this realm had a lot of room to make what they wished of their lands, within the logical limits of a management model that had to meet domestic needs and additional and increasing forms of taxation (royal, urban, seigniorial). Leasing and sharecropping existed and were ubiquitous in the kingdom of Valencia during the late medieval period. However, historians acknowledge that resorting to these two contracts was mostly a way to complement the centrality of the other figures, rather than being an essential way of life for dispossessed peasants. Prior analysis of leasing contracts concluded that these figures did not act as a way of introducing urban capital or new crops, but they followed a rent-seeking logic that underpinned the familial nature of small peasant holdings. Leaseholders were predominantly peasants themselves, most of them landowners too, who rented scattered plots to meet the requirements of their family size. According to some authors, only a minority of peasants were landless individuals who turned to lease-holding to avoid waged labour.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the study of agricultural wage-earners (*bracers*) in the realm contends that there was no substantial, compact social group of landless agricultural workers during the later Middle Ages. Rather, most agricultural waged labour manifested itself in the shape of young peasants from the neighbouring kingdom of Castile, who came to the kingdom of Valencia to work seasonally.¹⁹

This nature and the features of Valencian small peasant holdings has led scholars to generally assume that landlessness would not have been a widespread reality across the realm. Inventories however appear to provide a less positive image. The 191 specimens analysed make it possible to identify peasant landowners and landless peasants. Table 1 classifies these individuals as to this condition, as well as by region and chronology. In general terms, these data suggest landlessness was effectively twice as widespread as land ownership in the fourteenth century. Around one third of inventoried peasants possessed some sort of land, while the other two thirds owned none. This analysis reveals similar, stable figures in both chronological periods or perhaps a subtle increase in land dispossession (see percentages in ‘Landless’, ‘Total’).

¹⁸ Mira, Viciano, “Arrendaments i parceries.”

¹⁹ Viciano, “Treballar per a altres,” in particular 346.

Table 1. *Landowner and landless peasants*

	1283-1350						1351-1400					
	Landowners		Landless		All		Landowners		Landless		All	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
<i>Valencia (city)</i>	4	57,1	3	42,9	7	100	1	20	4	80	5	100
<i>Valencia (hinterland)</i>	17	58,6	12	41,4	29	100	5	50	5	50	10	100
<i>Morvedre</i>	16	28,6	40	71,4	56	100	0	0	0	0	0	100
<i>North</i>	0	0	4	100	4	100	6	18,8	26	81,3	32	100
<i>Centre-South</i>	4	21,1	15	78,9	19	100	13	44,8	16	55,2	29	100
Total	41	35,7	74	64,3	115	100	25	32,9	51	67,1	76	100

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

A more regional approach allows us to refine these findings. As shown also by Table 1, more than half of the inventoried peasants living within the walls of the city of Valencia and its hinterland would have had a plot of land by 1350 (57 and 58%). Meanwhile, in more peripheral areas of the realm, in the centre-south of the kingdom and in a medium-sized town like Morvedre, agricultural properties appear to be owned by a quarter of the peasantry (21,1 and 28,6%). It is worth noting that none of the peasant inventories from the northern regions of the kingdom reveal lands in this period, although this may perhaps be explained by the very few extant cases forming that sample by 1350. Therefore, there seems to have been a certain hierarchy, with land ownership being more widespread among peasants in the central areas of the realm, and more particularly in the area of the capital. During the second half of the fourteenth century, land ownership proves to be more present in inventories from the peripheral areas of the kingdom compared to the pre-1350 period, leading these interregional inequalities to be not so acute. Inventories from those years show land ownership decreasing among peasants of the city of Valencia (from 57,1 to 20%) and in its hinterland (from 58,6 to 50%). It is at this time when northern peasants appear recorded with agricultural possessions for the first time (18,8%), while inventories from more southerly areas of the realm reveal a significant increase in land ownership (44,8%, from 21,1% in the pre-1350 period).

This apparent importance of landlessness according to the inventories, which does not seem to fit the image provided by scholarship, could be explained if the forms of indirect management of land use were more important than has traditionally been considered. More Valencian peasant families may possibly have lived from leasing and sharecropping than previously thought. Regardless of that, landownership and landlessness as depicted in inventories provide a first clear image of the existence of important real estate inequalities among peasants even before the Black Death, at the level of the kingdom and also within its regions.

Differences were also present among landowners themselves, who were far from equal. Acreages of land holdings would represent a remarkable indi-

cator for assessing wealth inequalities. Yet the size of most pieces of land was generally not specified by the notaries who wrote the inventories of this period, recording them simply as ‘plots’ (*trossos*). The next section of this article will endeavour to infer some basic – although certain – findings from scant references to plot sizes. By now, and even if they are not the best indicator, inequalities among the peasantry can easily be detected in inventories through the number of plots of land. This information is recorded abundantly enough to be studied quantitatively and, moreover, it is liable to cross-referencing with tax and notarial records from other Valencian areas to assess the consistency of the image they provide. Table 2 shows the number of landowners in each area, along with the total, maximum, minimum, mean and median number of plots. The table reveals that many peasant land holdings were in fact a combination of many plots, often scattered across different municipal territories. A total of 374 plots were owned by these 191 peasants. While some owners possessed just a couple of pieces of land, others possessed more than 30. The mean number of plots reveals figures of between 2 and 6 pieces, depending on the areas. These numbers are roughly consistent with those inferred from other sources. In the hinterland of Valencia, Antoni Furió and Antonio José Mira estimated through notarial records that peasants possessed between 6 and 12 pieces of land in the fifteenth century,²⁰ not very different from the 3 to 14 range that can be observed in Table 2 (minimum and maximum figures from 1351-1400, ‘Valencia (hinterland)’). Similar data has been obtained from tax records from 1370 in Vila-real, a town in the north of the kingdom, where the average number of plots per owner was 4.2. The same type of register showed that in Castelló, not far away from Vila-real, peasant holdings were made up of 5 or 6 pieces, while in Sueca, a more rural community in the central-southern region of La Ribera, the average could still be placed between 6 and 8 plots in the second half of the fifteenth century.²¹

Table 2. *Ownership of land plots*

	Period	Landowners (N.)	Plots (N.)	Max	Min	Mean	Median
<i>Morvedre</i>	1348-50	16	92	17	1	5,75	5
<i>Valencia (city)</i>	1283-1350	4	11	5	1	2,75	2,5
<i>Valencia (city)</i>	1351-1400	1	3	3	3	3	3
<i>Valencia (hinterland)</i>	1283-1350	17	138	35	1	8,11	6
<i>Valencia (hinterland)</i>	1351-1400	5	30	14	3	6	5
<i>North</i>	1351-1400	6	17	6	1	2,83	3
<i>Centre-South</i>	1283-1350	4	13	5	2	3,25	3
<i>Centre-South</i>	1351-1400	13	70	33	1	5,38	3

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

²⁰ Furió, Mira, “La ciudad y el campo,” 238.

²¹ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 161, footnote 4, based on local data from those places.

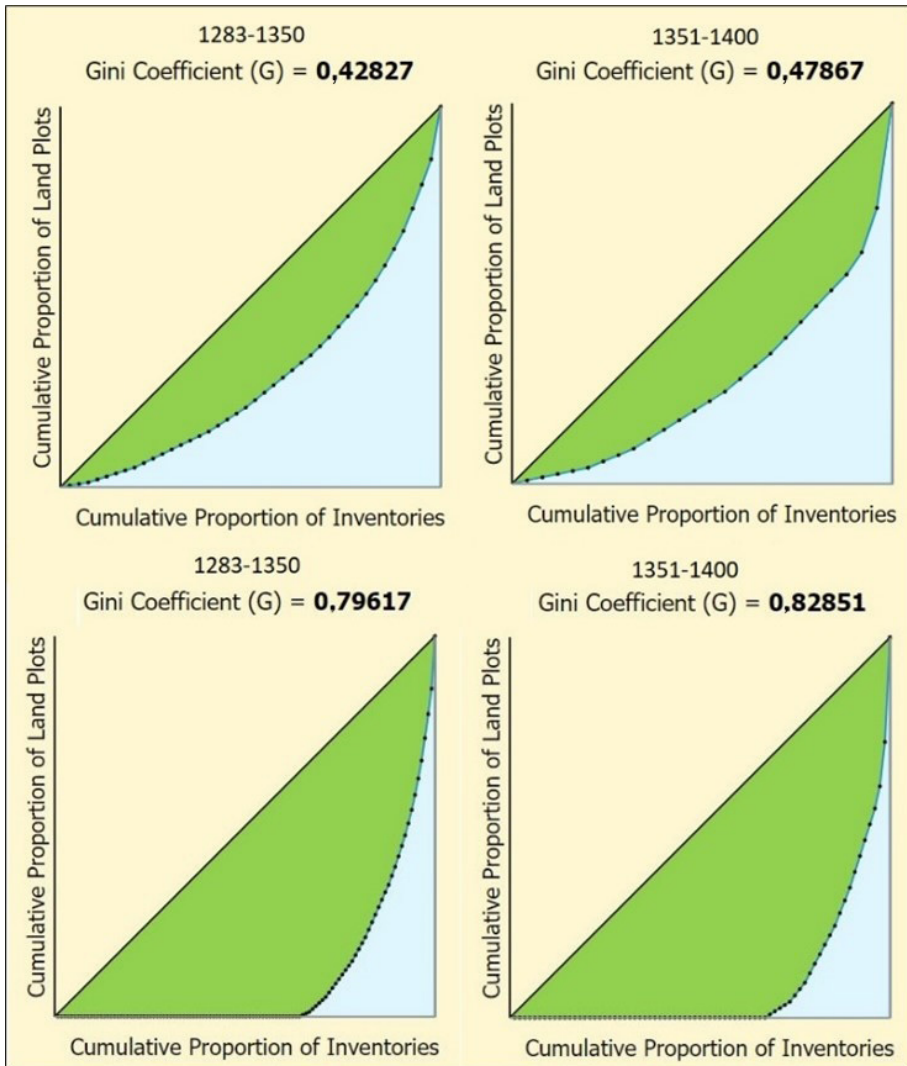


Figure 1. Gini coefficients and Lorenz curves as to plot ownership distribution

Note: the upper two figures correspond to land plot distribution across peasant landowners only, while the two figures below consider also landless peasants. See text for details.

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

Ownership of plots of land in probate inventories is thus similar to the picture painted by other contemporary sources. In the absence of land acreage in most inventories, Figure 1 shows Lorenz curves as to land plot ownership distribution across all peasants in two periods. The top two figures consider peasant landowners only, while the two figures below also include landless peasants. This method suggests inequalities in plot ownership would have slightly increased when comparing the period before 1350 with the subsequent one. The Gini coefficient among landowners would be 0,42 by then, and 0,47 thereafter. When including landless peasants – whose plots of land are taken as ‘zero’ – the coefficients are logically much higher, but they still reveal the trend towards higher inequality, increasing from 0,79 to 0,82. Replicating this method on a local level would help us to understand whether these dynamics are representative of the entire realm or revealing of inter-regional changes in landownership. The samples are however not large enough to extract Gini coefficients on that minor scale.

3. *Acreages of peasant holdings and their distribution*

The number of plots per holding provides a rough idea of the abundance and scarcity of land but acreage figures actually prove to be a better indicator. The issue is that probate inventories from this period, as explained earlier, do not refer to plot sizes in most cases. When land is measured, it appears described in *jovades*, *cafissades* or, essentially, in *fanecades* (0,08 ha.).²² Only 75 out of the 374 plots owned by these peasants provide usable references to their size, from which various findings can be inferred. The very first one to note is that plot sizes are revealed as particularly tiny, consistent with the alleged smallness of plots of land that was characteristic of the Valencian agrarian structure. As shown in Table 3, plots of land in the various areas of the realm studied rarely exceeded 2 ha., and many of them were as small as just 1 *fanecada*. In fact, the mean size per plot does not reach 1 ha. in any location. This data agrees with evidence from tax records in other locations. In 1398 in Castelló, the average size per plot was 0,62 ha. The situation was similar a century later, not only in Castelló, but also in villages in the centre like Catarroja, close to the city of Valencia, as well as in Lliria, a town located towards more inland areas of the kingdom. In the rural hinterland of the city of Valencia other sources have suggested that plots of land ranged from 0,25 to 0,83 ha. over the course of the fifteenth century.²³

²² 1 *jovada* = 6 *cafissades* = 36 *fanecades*.

²³ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 161-2.

Table 3. *Sizes of land plots (in hectares)*

	Period	Measured plots (N.)	Max	Min	Mean	Median
<i>Morvedre</i>	1348-50	10	5,76	0,08	0,89	0,16
<i>Valencia (city)</i>	1283-1350	5	0,88	0,24	0,49	0,4
<i>Valencia (city)</i>	1351-1400	3	1,44	0,48	0,85	0,64
<i>Valencia (hinterland)</i>	1283-1350	25	2	0,08	0,44	0,48
<i>Valencia (hinterland)</i>	1351-1400	13	1,28	0,08	0,29	0,16
<i>Centre-South</i>	1351-1400	19	2,4	0,08	0,49	0,32

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

But one thing was plots and something very different were the peasant holdings made up by combining several of them. Internal inequalities are clearly seen when making an in-depth picture of tenancies at a regional level. The Valencian peasantry was far from monolithic or homogeneous, but importantly stratified all over the kingdom even before the Black Death. Tables 4 and 5 provide a full breakdown of the composition of the 36 peasant households that owned the aforementioned 75 plots of land described with a size, alongside the acreage of each crop type and the sum total per family. The figures include the number of inventoried plots of no specific size possessed by these individuals. For example, Joan Liminyà from Morvedre, who died in 1350, is described in his inventory as being in possession of 17 plots of land, of which only 2 appear with a total size of 5,84 ha.²⁴ The data therefore needs to be addressed carefully, combining quantitative and qualitative comparisons to achieve concrete findings.

A look at the tables shows that only eight fully measured holdings exist. All others provide plot sizes in combination with a variable unmeasured number of plots. Those 'reliable' eight cases significantly reveal the smallness of most peasant holdings across the kingdom and, even within these humble dimensions, the existence of important patrimonial wealth inequalities. These eight cases correspond to: Pere Canós, from Canet (hinterland of Morvedre); Joan d'Arcanyira and Aparisi Garcia from Gandia; an unknown woman from Alzira (central-southern areas); Andreu Avellà from Ternils (close to the previous location); Sabrina and Pere Oller, the widow of a peasant and a peasant living in the city of Valencia; and Jaume Roiz from Manises (hinterland of the capital).²⁵ Their holdings ranged from 0,4 to 2,5 ha., five of them being less than 1 ha., and only two of them more than 2 ha. The comparisons of these fully measured holdings with some of the partly measured ones highlights

²⁴ AMV, Domingo Joan, I-2, 13 September 1350.

²⁵ AMV, Domingo Joan, I-1, 15 October 1348; AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, Miquel Bungal, 26 May 1397; AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, Ramon Agualada, leg. 1.172, no. 5, 25 September 1391; AMAlz, Bernat Llorens, 040/6, 29 June 1381; AMAlz, Bernat Llorens, 040/8, subsequent to 3 February 1384; APCCV, Vicent Queralt, 1.412, 23 September 1381; ARV, Aparisi Lapart, 10.408, 24 September 1326; AMV, Antoni Cortés, m-1, 11 August 1375.

the existence of severe agrarian patrimonial inequalities. As showed by Table 4, Pere Canós possessed 1,44 ha., while Joan Liminyà from Morvedre accumulated four times as much in just two plots: 0,08 ha. of 'land' – most likely cereal, as discussed in the following section – and the remarkable quantity of 5,76 ha. of vines.²⁶ Liminyà was also the owner of another 15 unmeasured plots. It is worth pointing out that in vines Liminyà possessed a larger quantity of land, compared to the basic cereal plots owned by the examples above. This suggests important involvement in the wine-making market that agrees with the orientation to this activity in the town of Morvedre.²⁷

The case of Liminyà, most likely an affluent peasant, is replicated in other areas of the kingdom. In the central-southern areas of the realm, Miquel Segura possessed 2,88 ha. in three measured plots, as well as twenty-two other unmeasured pieces. While the known size of his holding might appear unsurprising compared to Liminyà, it is still larger than the aforementioned eight cases from which measured holdings could be addressed. More important is the fact that Segura's case shows a diversified group of crops, including the only reference to a measured piece of land sown with flax, of 0,4 ha. This was a wholly commercial crop, the produce of which was then transformed into linen, a basic fabric for ordinary people.²⁸

These contrasts are the most reliable ones that can be established from the limited evidence on acreage provided by inventories from this period. All other data provided by the tables need to be treated carefully, for there is no way of knowing how large unmeasured plots actually were. Therefore, the picture provided by partial acreages alone cannot lead to conclusive findings. It can be seen that the total acreage for partially measured holdings ranged effectively from 0,08 ha. (one *fanecada*) to 2,88, with the exception of the aforementioned case of Liminyà. Meanwhile, unmeasured plots per inventory consist essentially of up to three pieces, with exceptions far in excess of that figure. The most striking case is that of Jaume Sobirats, from the hinterland of Valencia, who possessed 34 plots of land, only two of them being described with a size (0,88 ha. together).

Table 4. *Acreage of land holdings owned by peasants from Morvedre and central-southern areas of the kingdom of Valencia*

Owner	Year	Plots with size (N.)	Total acreage (ha.)	'Land' (ha.)	Vineyard (ha.)	Olive groove (ha.)	Terra campa (ha.)	Flax (ha.)	Orchard (ha.)	Plots with no size (N.)
<i>Morvedre (1348-50)</i>										
Llorens Majol	1348	3	1,12	0,16	0,96					2

²⁶ AMV, Domingo Joan, I-1, 15 October 1348. AMV, Domingo Joan, I-2, 13 September 1350.

²⁷ Guinot, "Morvedre."

²⁸ Aparisi, "El cultivo y procesado del lino."

Pa-squal Radio	1348	1	0,08	0,08				2
Pere Canós	1348	1	1,44		1,44			0
Caterina	1349	1	0,16	0,16				7
Pere Rodri-go	1349	2	0,32	0,16		0,16		3
Joan Li-minyà	1350	2	5,84	0,08	5,76			15
<i>Centre-South (1380-94)</i>								
Andreu Avellà	1380	5	2,08	2,08				0
Unknown women	1384	1	0,4	0,4				0
Mica-ela	1384	5	0,88	0,8	0,08			2
Joan d'Ar-canyira	1390	2	0,4	0,4				0
Aparisi Garcia	1391	1	0,96		0,96			0
Miquel Segura	1391	3	2,88	2,4		0,4	0,08	22
Berto-meu Llavata	1394	2	1,76	1,44		0,32		3

Note: only the cases with references to acreages from this period and locations are included in this table. See text for details.

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

Table 5. *Acreage of land holdings owned by peasants from the city of Valencia and its hinterland*

Owner	Year	Plots with size (N.)	Total acreage (ha.)	'Land' (ha.)	Vineyard (ha.)	<i>Terra campa</i> (ha.)	Plots with no size (N.)
<i>Valencia (city) – 1322-8</i>							
Pere Pich and his wife	1322	1	0,24	0,24			1
Francesca	1326	1	0,4	0,4			2
Pere Oller	1326	1	0,888	0,888			0
Pere Aninou	1328	2	0,96	0,96			3
<i>Valencia (city) – 1381</i>							
Sabrina	1381	3	2,568	2,568			0

<i>Valencia (hinterland) – 1298-1336</i>						
Jaume Rapacius	1298	3	1,06	0,34	0,72	1
Ponç de Ape and Guillamo-na	1298	2	0,32	0,32		2
Eximén Llopis	1325	2	2,12	2	0,12	13
Jaume Sobirats	1326	2	0,88	0,88		32
Arnau Gaçó	1330	3	0,64	0,16	0,48	3
Bartomeua	1330	1	0,08	0,08		2
Doménec Mateu and his wife Joana	1330	1	0,48	0,48		15
Doménec Pere de Pedrola	1330	1	0,08	0,08		2
Guillem Conques	1330	4	2,4	1,2	1,2	3
Sancho Llopis and his wife	1330	1	0,08	0,08		1
Doménec Almenar	1332	1	0,48	0,48		9
Miquel Fortanet	1332	2	1,04	0,08	0,96	4
Mateu Rubió	1336	2	1,44		1,44	5
<i>Valencia (hinterland) – 1375-81</i>						
Jaume Roiz	1375	5	0,52	0,52		0
Sancho Roiz	1375	1	0,08		0,08	1
Pere Moliner	1381	2	1,76		1,76	1
Pere Oliva	1381	1	0,72		0,72	2
Sancho Cola	1381	4	0,72	0,72		10

Note: only the cases with references to acreages from this period and locations are included in this table. See text for details.

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

Inequalities in land ownership were clearly ubiquitous in the realm during the fourteenth century. Yet how did they develop over the century and what was the presumable impact of the Black Death? It is generally acknowledged that Valencian peasant land holdings tended to be smaller between the thirteenth and the fifteenth century. This is because the kingdom was founded in 1238 when earlier Islamic political entities were destroyed, and as a result of that a process of land distribution took place to reward the Christian conquerors. Brand new, particularly large land holdings were created to fuel the war against the Muslims and to stimulate the process of conquest of the emerging new kingdom of Valencia. The *Llibre del repartiment* (1237-45, 1252) (book of distribution, a record similar to the English *Domesday Book*), reveals that these original land holdings measured 9 ha. on average during the second half of the thirteenth century. It is worth noting that, in this period, French, English and Flemish equivalents would average 3 to 4 ha., as a result of the limits of the demographic growth that developed during the high Middle Ages.²⁹ This original Valencian situation of large agrarian properties lasted a couple of generations. The active land market and the inheritance system, which involved the equal division of property among heirs, rapidly led to a process of fragmentation. The phenomenon has not been studied in depth, but it is accepted that the ubiquity of small rather than large peasant holdings was already consolidated by the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁰ The small acreages of holdings provided by inventories, as seen in the tables in this section, would support and confirm such a chronology.

How fragmentation developed in the fourteenth century and its implications for peasant inequality are unknown, but some ideas can be inferred if we take the evidence of the probate inventories from the former tables together in order to provide data for the whole kingdom. Table 6 shows the average size of peasant landholdings of landowners with partly or fully measured holdings (36 out of the 191 households). By 1350 this would have been 0,9 ha., and 1,2 in the second half of the century. If a process can be inferred from this arguably patchy evidence, it would be one of a slight increase in the mean size of holdings. If fully measured holdings are taken alone, figures of 1,1 ha. emerge for both periods, although relying on an overly small sample. In line with this evidence is Table 7, in which the distribution of partly and fully measured holdings can be seen, providing a broader image than that of average hectares. According to this latter table, landowners with less than 1 ha. would have decreased slightly, from 65 to 61,5%, while those with 1 to 3 ha. increased from 30 to 38%. It is important to remember that previous data on landlessness has shown that peasant households deprived of land would have increased slightly between the two periods (from 64,3 to 67,1%, Table 1, percentages in 'Landless', 'Total'). Since the proportion of landless peasants rose,

²⁹ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 83.

³⁰ Viciano, 161.

while landowners expanded their patrimonies, a growth in peasant wealth inequality can be argued as far as land ownership is concerned.

Table 6. *Mean acreage of land owned by all studied peasants*

Period	Landowners with partly or fully measured holdings (N.)	Mean size (ha.)	Landowners with fully measured holdings only (N.)	Mean size (ha.)
1283-1350	23	0,9	2	1,1
1351-1400	13	1,2	6	1,1

Source: dataset of the author based on 36 of the 191 inventories studied in this article. See text for details.

Table 7. *Number of peasant holdings according to their size (in hectares)*

Period	Landowners	Less than 1	1 to 3	3,1 to 5	More than 5
1283-1350	23 (100%)	15 (65%)	7 (30%)		1 (4%)
1351-1400	13 (100%)	8 (61,5%)	5 (38%)		

Source: dataset of the author based on 36 of the 191 inventories studied in this article. See text for details.

In sum, peasant households with larger holdings would have increased after the Black Death, while those with less land would have diminished. The balance would have been positive for landowners, as suggested by the slight boost in the mean acreage of land. However, a substantial mass of landless peasants remained the same or increased slightly, and thus land ownership inequality grew as well, which would agree with the rising Gini coefficients on plot ownership presented earlier. An arguable reason is that peasant households with land were probably wealthier and had better income sources to purchase new plots on the market to enlarge their holdings. This would have been particularly possible once real wages began an upward trend. On that, Carlos Álvarez-Nogal and Leandro Prados de la Escosura suggest that real wages in Spain increased from 1275 to the Black Death in 1348, when they would have fallen sharply until the 1360s. After that time, they would have grown back to pre-plague levels by around 1400, a situation that lasted until the 1450s.³¹ Specifically Valencian data provided by Antoni Furió, from the capital of the kingdom and from the town of Alzira, shows that between 1375 and 1450 agricultural real wages doubled, while urban ones multiplied by 1,3, both of them remaining relatively stable thereafter until 1500.³²

As suggested by tax records there might have been a trend towards a more egalitarian land distribution from at least the late fourteenth century

³¹ Álvarez-Nogal, Prados, "The rise and fall," 6.

³² See review of these data in Almenar, "La cultura material de la alimentación campesina," 235-7.

until the middle of the fifteenth century. According to those from Castelló, Pau Viciano identified the average plot size as 0,62 ha. in 1398, moving to 0,7 ha. in 1468.³³ This scholar has suggested that the change was due to a fall in demographic pressure, following the pandemic outbreaks of the fourteenth century.³⁴ Those registries also reveal a decrease in population (886 to 729 taxpayers) and Gini coefficients with regard to wealth distribution (0,548 to 0,492). Both variables would be increasing in subsequent years (in 1497, 653 taxpayers, Gini 0,509; in 1599, 1.239 taxpayers, Gini 0,616).³⁵ It is from the mid-fifteenth century when tax records suggest an unstoppable upward trend in inequality around the realm, in both town and countryside. In Sueca, a rural community of 1.000 inhabitants, Gini coefficients show a rising trend thereafter (0,41 in 1453, 0,52 in 1494, 0,46 in 1509). In Alzira, a larger place with 5.000 people in the same region, the Gini coefficient was 0,51 in 1468, increasing slightly until 1515 (when it was 0,54). In its rural hinterland, inequality was lower, 0,48 in 1474-9, and subsequently similar.³⁶

It is these fifteenth-century tax records that have led us to establish a model of Valencian peasant land distribution that consists of much higher acreages than those revealed by fourteenth-century inventories. This fact might suggest that, indeed, the formation of larger agrarian patrimonies that seems apparent for the post-plague period would continue during the subsequent century. According to such a model, in the fifteenth century 60% of the Valencian peasantry would own less than 5 ha., 25% from 5 to 10 ha., and only 15% possessed more than that. While local disparities existed, these sizes are found across the kingdom. In central-southern regions like La Ribera, 70% of holdings were under 5 ha, similar to the situation in the rural hinterland of the city of Valencia in 1468 (60% of holdings under 5 ha.). In northern rural communities like Culla, 40% of locals owned 4-5 ha.³⁷

4. Crop types: subsistence and commercialization

Crop types are identified in many inventories and are important for assessing peasant wealth levels, as they hint at their involvement in agrarian commercialization and other activities. Some pieces of land were even referred to with popular terms that were in use by rural communities as part of the local geography. For instance, the inventory of a peasant from Albal, in the hinterland of the city of Valencia, called Jaume Sobirats, describes one of his plots as the one “called the piece with the little springs”, while another

³³ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 161.

³⁴ Viciano, 85.

³⁵ Data from Furió *et al.*, “Measuring economic inequality,” 190.

³⁶ Furió, “Economic Inequality in Iberia,” 16.

³⁷ Viciano, *Els peus que calciguen la terra*, 84-5.

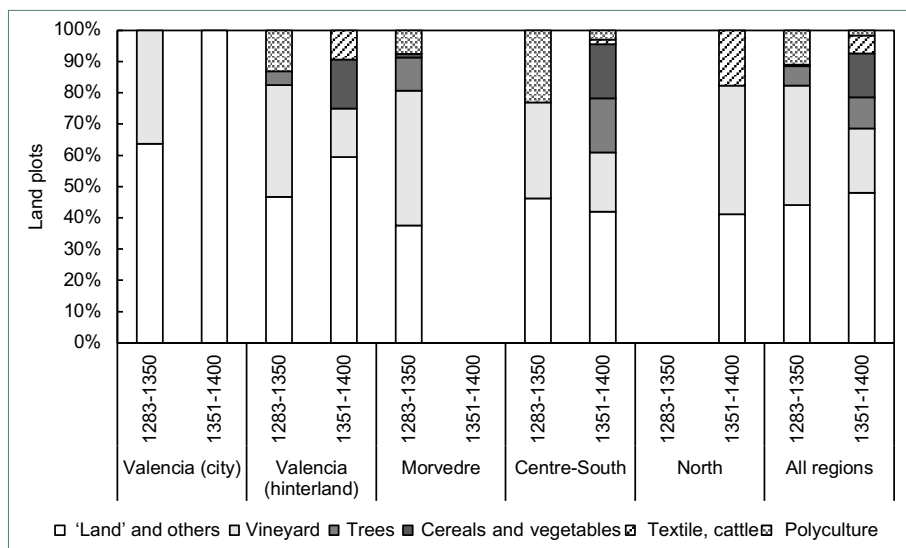


Figure 2. Incidence of crop types in peasant inventories

Source: dataset of the author based on the 191 inventories studied in this article.

one was referred to as “the one with the large olive tree”, suggesting it was an olive grove.³⁸

The range of land types recorded in inventories is consistent with a model of Mediterranean agriculture, with wheat, olives and vines as the main crops, in combination with other species like carob and fig trees, holm oaks, and other minor cereals like barley and sorghum. An analysis of the importance of all these crop types necessarily involves relying on numbers of plots, given the relatively scarce references to acreages that was discussed in the previous section. Figure 2 shows the incidence of plots of each species on the total per period and region, suggesting changes of type and inter-regional agrarian differences.

One of the first things to notice is the overall importance of vines among Valencian peasants during the fourteenth century, both in the shape of mature crops (*vinya*) and young ones (*mallol*). At a regional level, higher numbers of plots of this crop are present in the northern areas of the kingdom, as well as in Morvedre. Environmental reasons may be the reason for this difference, since vines are essentially a dryland crop, while irrigated land was more characteristic of the other farmed areas, like the hinterland of Valencia and the middle-southern areas of the realm. Morvedre was known in the period for its medium-quality wines, and many locals were involved in its

³⁸ *Un troç de terra, apellat lo troç de les fontanelles, un troç de terra, apellat de la olivera grossa*: ARV, Aparisi Lapart, 10.408, 29 July 1326.

production.³⁹ Even so, it is worth noting how important this crop was, even in those places more noted for irrigated agriculture, where vineyards appear in between 20 and 30% of inventoried plots, depending on the area and period.

Another set of crop types are trees, of which olives are the most important, but also other ones like carob trees, fig trees and holm oaks (*carrascal*). Orchards thus appear to be fewer in number than vineyards, from 10 to 20% of plots depending on the place and period. At a local level, the importance of trees seems particularly clear in Morvedre and in the central-southern areas of the kingdom. In actual fact, the ownership of these trees was generally higher, since they were often grown in combination with other crops in the same plot. The category called 'polyculture' in Figure 2 is precisely formed by vines or cereal crops, recorded in inventories together with fig trees, olive trees, holm oaks, or all of them together. Nevertheless, the relatively lower incidence of this category also stresses the importance of single-crop farming over polyculture in Valencian peasant holdings.

A further general aspect that developed particularly during the second half of the fourteenth century according to Figure 2 is the emergence of species oriented towards textile production or husbandry. This can be seen particularly in the hinterland of the city of Valencia and in the northern areas of the realm. This includes flax farming, but also the growing of fodder and alfalfa as animal feed.

One must assume that cereals and vegetables predominated over all other species. Paradoxically, inventories barely identify these species in cultivation, not even wheat. The low incidence of the category 'cereals and vegetables' in Figure 2, in fact, emerges from anecdotal references and reasonable deductions. This label includes plots identified as 'clear land' (*terra campà*), a term that was used in the period for fields with no trees or vineyards, normally used for cereals and vegetables. Of course, cereals were essential for household consumption and their sale in the market, so it is most likely that this crop was present in those plots called simply 'land' (*terra*). In fact, this generic term predominates over any of those already described. Figure 2 considers plots of these unspecific fields in the 'land and others' category, which is formed essentially of plots of *terra*, alongside occasional mentions of marshlands (*terra marjal*) and orchards (*orts*). Some particularly well described plots of 'land' do refer to the species under cultivation. Eximén Llopis possessed 25 *fanecades* (2 ha.) of 'land' in 1323 in Alfafar, in the hinterland of the city of Valencia, of which 1.5 were "planted with onions".⁴⁰ This is the earliest of the few specific descriptions of vegetable and cereal crops. Later in the century, Sancho Cola from Torrent, a village in the southern hinterland of the capital, owned in 1381 "a piece of land, planted with sorghum" (*adacça*) in Foios. This latter village was also in the hinterland of the capital, but in the northern area, showing the characteris-

³⁹ Guinot, "Morvedre."

⁴⁰ *Plantada de cebes*: ARV, Aparisi Lapart, 2.855, 28 July 1325.

tic scattering of plots of land that made up Valencian peasant holdings.⁴¹ In 1391 Miquel Segura, from the more central-southern region of La Safor, possessed in Ràfol de Valldigna various plots “planted with wheat” (*forment*), as well as one piece “planted with barley” (*ordi*).⁴²

The inventory of Miquel Segura is particularly revealing, for it describes the agrarian possessions of what seems to have been an affluent peasant owner. Out of his many pieces of land planted with wheat, the case of one measuring 30 *fanecades* (2,4 ha.) must be noted, “planted with wheat, which were leased out by the deceased”.⁴³ This exceptional reference, the only one of this kind found in this sample, highlights the fact that affluent landowners could generate an additional source of income by transferring the land use of some plots to other peasants. Miquel Segura also owned in the same place a plot “on irrigated land, half of it planted with wheat, the other half being left fallow”.⁴⁴ This, again, is an exceptional reference in this sample, one that reveals the peasants’ strategies to regenerate their lands and to maintain substantial and sufficient productivity levels.

The evidence from the town of Morvedre is particularly relevant for assessing how consistent the picture of crop types provided by other regions is. Regional sets of inventories rely on the gathering of scattered specimens of these documents in various notarial records from different years in the time spans under analysis. Conversely, the case of Morvedre is unique in documentary terms, for an extraordinary corpus of 56 peasant inventories are contained in the same notarial record mostly from the year 1348. This means an important number of deceased who most likely passed away due to the Black Death. Therefore, those inventories provide a fixed image of land ownership as it developed up to the arrival of the plague. The Morvedre sample shows, as seen in Figure 2, that 40% of plots were vineyards and another 35% were ‘land and others’ (essentially ‘land’ or *terra*, as explained earlier, likely for cereals). The remaining plots consisted of trees and polyculture. Therefore, this sample itself supports the hierarchy of crop types that can be inferred through the other regional samples that rely on inventories from more varied years.

Finally, inventories also provide exceptional references to income diversification beyond agricultural labour, as can be seen particularly with Jaume Sobirats from Albal. This peasant possessed in 1326 a piece of “land and vines, in which there is a brick kiln”.⁴⁵ The inclusion of the kiln (*forn de rajoles*) in the inventory proves it was owned by him, but not necessarily that he worked

⁴¹ *Sembrat d’adacça*: ARV, Arcusio de Collent, 2.563, 26 June 1375.

⁴² *Terra sembrada de forment*: AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, Joan Llorca, leg. 1.136, no. 4, 4 January 1391.

⁴³ *XXX fanecades de terra sembrada de forment, les quals lo dit defunt tenia arrendades*: AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, Joan Llorca, leg. 1.136, no. 4, 4 January 1391.

⁴⁴ *Un troç de terra en los orts, sembrat la meytat de forment, l’altra meytat guaret*: AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, Joan Llorca, leg. 1.136, no. 4, 4 January 1391.

⁴⁵ *Un troç de terra e vinya, en què ha un forn de rajoles*: ARV, Aparisi Lapart, 10.408, 29 July 1326.

in it. It is more likely that the structure was leased out to potters. These craftsmen needed to dig holes for their clay supply, and they often built their kilns next to excavated pieces of land, particularly in brick production (*rajola*). This led them to come to various sorts of agreements with landowners.⁴⁶

5. Conclusion

As in other parts of Europe, the demographic impact of the Black Death prompted a reconfiguration of landownership in the kingdom of Valencia that has yet to be explored in depth. In a peasant society marked by internal differences, larger agrarian patrimonies were formed, which widened the gap between peasant landowners and landless peasants. The rising standard of living that seems undeniable at least from the 1370s was taken advantage of more by wealthier peasants to purchase new plots, in an active land market triggered by the properties of deceased neighbours that would be sold by heirs, lacking the will or the capability of maintaining inherited agrarian patrimonies. This all went hand in hand with the introduction of new crops and agrarian innovation, contributing to the commercialization of a market-oriented, noticeable economy in the north-western Mediterranean context. As far as land ownership and distribution is concerned, the data presented in this article focuses on the immediate post-plague period as a moment of rising wealth inequality. It would be in a period yet to be analysed in depth, halfway between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, when inequalities in land ownership and wealth diminished, as revealed by tax records. The same sources reveal also that the upward trend would return around the mid-fifteenth century, at least for the rest of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period.

The evidence provided by probate inventories shows the importance of the use of alternative sources for remote periods of the Middle Ages for which tax records barely survive. The same interest can be mentioned for studying particular social groups, like the peasantry. In this case, their study as a historical subject allows for a closer approach to the social contexts, causes and effects of inequality. Land ownership as revealed by these sources has helped us to reconstruct the chronological dynamics of inequality in the fourteenth century, to reflect upon the impact of the Black Death, and upon the reaction of the peasantry to new land market opportunities. In the end, what the Valencian (and perhaps Iberian) process would reveal is a certain singularity at the 'starting point' of this story, with the boost in inequality upon the arrival of the plague in 1348 contended by economists. The Iberian originality, however, only lasted until the 1370s. Inequality decreased after that until the mid-fifteenth century, when the peninsula joined in the upward trend that was present in other European scenarios.

⁴⁶ Almenar, "Explotación y transformación de recursos naturales," 405-6.

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II

Contexts, dynamics and causalities

Disuguaglianza, impoverimento e pauperismo nell'Occidente latino (secoli XI-XIV)

di Laurent Feller

Nelle società occidentali la disuguaglianza principale nasce dalla posizione degli attori di fronte ai rischi propri della vita economica, anche in un contesto di crescita globale. Tali rischi suscitano una incertezza permanente mentre l'impoverimento diviene una minaccia costante per chi dipende solamente dal proprio lavoro per vivere. L'instabilità dei prezzi, combinata con l'insufficienza dei salari, genera infatti una massa di lavoratori poveri che dipendono per la loro sopravvivenza sia dalla carità pubblica o privata sia, più raramente, dalla solidarietà del corpo sociale. Questo saggio esamina le conseguenze sociali delle situazioni d'incertezza caratteristiche delle società medievali.

The fundamental inequality in Western societies is rooted in the position of those who are exposed to the risks inherent in economic life, even in a context of global growth. These risks create permanent insecurity, while impoverishment is a constant threat to those who depend solely on their work for their livelihood. Price instability, combined with inadequate wages, creates a mass of poor workers who depend for their survival on both public or private charity and, more rarely, on the solidarity of the social body. This essay examines the social consequences of the situations of insecurity characteristic of medieval societies.

Medioevo, secoli XI-XIV, Occidente latino, impoverimento, poveri laboriosi, povertà femminile, solidarietà.

Middle Ages, 11th-14th centuries, Latin West, impoverishment, working poor, female poverty, solidarity.

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Nelle pagine seguenti vorrei concentrarmi sull'espressione materiale della disuguaglianza, cioè sull'esistenza della povertà materiale nell'Occidente latino e sui suoi legami con la situazione economica. Si tratta di capire cosa significhi essere poveri e vivere in povertà in una società che si sta arricchendo, ma la cui economia è tuttavia sottoposta a forti tensioni a causa dell'incertezza dei raccolti e delle relative variazioni dei prezzi, nonché dell'organizzazione del lavoro nelle città.¹ Molti uomini e donne vivevano nella povertà e questo comportava una serie di atteggiamenti sociali. In primo luogo, l'azione e la capacità che ciascuno aveva di inventarsi strategie per evitare di cadere nella povertà o per uscirne, nel caso di accidenti che avessero avuto come conseguenza l'impoverimento.²

Quella che oggi viene definita *agency* presuppone come atteggiamento usuale il reagire e non solo il subire una situazione difficile – come la vedovanza per le donne, la perdita del lavoro per i salariati, la disoccupazione, la pressione crescente del signore sulle campagne e, per tutti, le carestie e l'aumentare eccessivo dei prezzi agricoli – provando a trovarvi delle soluzioni. Ma non tutti avevano la forza, la capacità e la possibilità di lottare contro gli eventi, favorendo di fatto l'accettazione e persino la rassegnazione alle situazioni di povertà. Tale atteggiamento poteva essere addirittura rafforzato dalle strutture di controllo, come la signoria o la Chiesa e i suoi 'satelliti' in città, le confraternite caritatevoli e, in alcuni casi, gli ospedali: la miseria poteva diventare allora uno status ereditario.³

Si nasce poveri e poveri si rimane, stabilendo così l'esistenza di una sottocultura particolare, caratterizzata dalla scarsità dei beni materiali a disposizione e dall'assenza di redditi sufficienti e, soprattutto, regolari.⁴ In questo senso, quella che Sandro Carocci definisce come la "pervasività della signoria" ha giocato un ruolo importante in questa accettazione. Il signore era percepito come vicino, benevolo e protettivo, anche se violento e oppressivo.⁵ In città, invece, le confraternite aiutavano e sostenevano i cosiddetti 'poveri vergognosi'. Le autorità comunali, da parte loro, sviluppando sofisticate e costose politiche annonarie, come nel caso di Firenze, rafforzavano ulteriormente la sottomissione a un ordine sociale diseguale ma non necessariamente percepito come ingiusto. Le rivolte, in ogni caso, erano rare e destinate a essere represse. Solo i Ciompi, nel 1378, poterono pensare – per un attimo – di aver vinto. Se la fame, o la paura della fame, provocava delle tensioni in città, queste raramente sfociavano nella rivolta dei meno abbienti. Tuttavia, nei movimenti politici, la paura del regresso sociale e della perdita di quel poco che si possedeva, aveva la sua importanza, come dimostra l'esempio ben conosciuto

¹ Per una presentazione generale del problema: Feller, "Introduction" al volume curato da Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté*. Importante è anche Piccinni, "All'apogeo."

² Fontaine, *Vivre pauvre*, 9-14.

³ Si veda il capitolo di Nanni in questo volume.

⁴ Sul concetto di cultura della povertà si veda Lewis, *Les enfants de Sanchez*.

⁵ Carocci, "Conclusioni."

della sommossa guidata dai Tolomei a Siena nel 1340 al grido di *Vivat populus et moriantur canes qui affamant nos*.⁶

1. Sopravvivere

Di fronte all'insufficienza strutturale dei redditi o alle crisi economiche che potevano condurre alla disoccupazione e da lì alla fame, i gruppi dominati, tuttavia, svilupparono numerose e complesse strategie di sopravvivenza. Federica Mazzi, per designarle, ha parlato dell'"arte di arrangiarsi", riferendosi a comportamenti più o meno delinquenziali o talvolta vicini alla delinquenza.⁷ Si tratta di atteggiamenti che possono essere appresi e cristallizzati e la parola 'armeggio' arrangiarsi è la più adatta a descriverli: si devono trovare continuamente soluzioni per riuscire a sopravvivere in condizioni molto dure, 'giocando' con i vari mestieri, passando da un'attività all'altra. Al riguardo, se il lavoro salariato era centrale in città e assai meno in campagna, in ambedue gli ambienti si trovavano (piccole) possibilità di integrazione del reddito. Ad esempio, lo sfruttamento di un orto, l'accesso ai beni comuni e, più specificamente nelle aree urbane, il commercio di strada e la vendita al minuto, finanche la rivendita degli oggetti dati in gratificazione o a complemento del salario. Si alimentava così un mercato complesso, frequentato soprattutto dai meno abbienti.

Il ricorso alle attività minute, che non costituivano dei mestieri veri e propri ma che completavano i salari, spesso insufficienti, era una necessità permanente che richiedeva una forma di agilità economica e di prontezza di reazione notevoli. L'incertezza del futuro, anche immediato, e la consapevolezza del rischio costante di non avere abbastanza risorse per far fronte alle spese contribuivano a costruire una vera e propria cultura del disagio e della povertà che si replicava e si trasmetteva alla generazione successiva. Incertezza, imprevedibilità, timore ma anche intraprendenza e capacità di sfruttare tutte le occasioni di guadagno che si presentavano erano i tratti salienti delle condizioni di vita dei poveri.⁸

Questi atteggiamenti erano tanto il risultato di conoscenze trasmesse quanto di improvvisazioni e reazioni spontanee. Il ricorso al mercato degli abiti usati come acquirenti o venditori, ad esempio, era la prima di queste soluzioni, che erano al tempo stesso una rinuncia e una necessità. Questo mercato, ormai abbastanza conosciuto, per quanto possibile, era alimentato dalla rivendita di oggetti che non si voleva più tenere o di cui si poteva fare a meno. Poteva essere sostenuto anche da piccoli furti ed era quindi legato al mondo del taccheggio e della ricettazione. Quando si tratta della proprietà di

⁶ Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto*, 97.

⁷ Mazzi, "L'arte di arrangiarsi."

⁸ Fontaine, *Vivre pauvre*, 11.

oggetti, la posta in gioco era molto alta e comportamenti riprovevoli, ai limiti della legalità, risultano diffusi.⁹ A Firenze nel 1343 uno statuto che regolava l'arte della tessitura della lana autorizzava i dipendenti a prendere i ritagli, gli scarti e i cascami di tessitura per venderli.¹⁰ In questo caso, un simile comportamento non era vietato e non era considerato un furto: potevano tuttavia esistere altre forme di frode, come il rubare un po' del tessuto al produttore e portarlo al banco dei pegni per poi riscattarlo. Oppure, per i tintori, non tingere subito il tessuto affidato loro, ma impegnarlo in cambio di contanti e poi recuperarlo: il caso è attestato a Siena, dove gli statuti dell'Arte, ovviamente, lo vietano. Comportamenti di questo tipo sono estremamente comuni e si riscontrano fino a tutta l'epoca moderna. Inoltre, anche il furto per fame era accettato e la scusa della necessità poteva essere utilizzata in tribunale.¹¹

La povertà, sia essa urbana o rurale, generava una serie di problemi che rafforzavano le disuguaglianze economiche e sociali. Da un lato, la povertà emarginava ed era legata a processi di 'dequalificazione', quando le competenze e il *know-how* non potevano essere messi a frutto. Dall'altro, la povertà poteva essere conseguenza anche della 'disaffiliazione', cioè della perdita dei legami familiari o di amicizia – e dunque della relativa solidarietà – che rendono possibile l'esistenza. Le istituzioni caritatevoli potevano compensare tutto ciò, ma in modo incompleto e sempre umiliante. Perché è anche di questo che si tratta, dell'umiliazione che viene subita da chi è impoverito o sta per diventarlo. Le conseguenze della disuguaglianza dei patrimoni e quelle derivanti dalla loro fluttuazione sono dunque particolarmente importanti, acuite per quanto riguarda le donne dalle disuguaglianze di genere. Mi propongo nelle pagine che seguono di riflettere su cosa significasse vivere in povertà nella società medievale: una povertà che, ovviamente, era subita e non scelta.

2. Instabilità e incertezza

Vivere in povertà significava innanzitutto essere soggetti a un regime di instabilità e incertezza che colpiva chi viveva del lavoro delle proprie mani ed era soggetto alle variazioni dei salari reali così come del prezzo e della disponibilità del cibo. Si viveva alla giornata: l'incertezza del lavoro e l'imprevedibilità dei guadagni erano una delle possibili definizioni di povertà; era una vita esposta a tutti i pericoli conseguenti alle variazioni della congiuntura. Lo mostra bene una testimonianza raccolta da Duccio Balestracci nell'archivio della Congregazione dei Poveri Vergognosi di Siena, in cui i poveri affermano di vivere giorno per giorno: *viviamo di per di come guadagnamo; vivo di di in di come el uciello*.¹²

⁹ Sul mercato dell'usato, si veda ad esempio García Marsilla, "Avec les vêtements des autres."

¹⁰ Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto*, 88-9.

¹¹ Couvreur, *Les pauvres ont-ils des droits?*

¹² Balestracci, "I lavoratori poveri," 368.

C'era anche chi viveva al limite della povertà. La sua situazione era caratterizzata dalla possibilità costante di passare da uno stato in cui i bisogni fondamentali erano soddisfatti a un altro in cui non lo erano più. Non ci voleva molto per passare da uno stato all'altro, da una situazione tollerabile all'indigenza e, di conseguenza, al declassamento. Una famiglia numerosa, delle figlie da mantenere e dei figli piccoli da allevare, dei compagni da sostenere, ma anche la vedovanza per le donne, costituivano tutti rischi che potevano portare all'impoverimento, spesso senza rimedio. Quando tali rischi si concretizzavano, la gente passava dalla mediocrità alla povertà, che si caratterizzava per non poter affrontare le spese della vita quotidiana senza un qualche aiuto. Si rientrava allora nella categoria dei 'poveri vergognosi'. L'instabilità economica portava con sé anche l'instabilità della condizione sociale, e di conseguenza il problema del mantenimento della dignità di coloro che, impoveriti, non potevano più vivere come erano abituati a fare e che non potevano o non volevano rendere pubblico tale stato.

Questa categoria comprendeva uomini e donne che non erano abituati a chiedere l'elemosina, ma che potevano avere bisogno di assistenza, temporaneamente o per un lungo periodo. Troviamo traccia di tali situazioni già in alcune agiografie e nei racconti di miracoli del XII secolo quando, ad esempio, il vescovo Berardo dei Marsi viene informato che una donna nobile sta per morire di fame non avendo né reddito né aiuto. Un miracolo 'alimentare', ottenuto grazie alle preghiere del vescovo, fa sì che la donna sfugga a questa morte miserabile.¹³

Per queste persone, per questi poveri vergognosi, le istituzioni caritatevoli cercavano di fornire assistenza affinché il loro status sociale non venisse compromesso in modo permanente e, una volta superata la crisi, potessero tornare al loro posto abituale nella società, riprendendo una vita normale. A Siena, tra il 1491 e il 1497, la Congregazione dei Poveri Vergognosi aiutò quasi mille di questi bisognosi nell'arco di sei anni, un'impresa non da poco per una città di circa 20.000 abitanti alla fine del XV secolo. Gli artigiani vi si rivolgevano spesso per chiedere aiuto quando le mogli erano in procinto di partorire oppure quando i figli erano ammalati o lo erano loro stessi: significava chiedere aiuto più volte all'anno. Questa forma di sostegno era abbastanza comune anche in tempi di grande necessità: era fondamentale a causa della cronica carenza di reddito e del peso delle spese nelle famiglie in cui solo il padre percepiva un salario.

La povertà vergognosa era anche legata a fenomeni ciclici, al culmine di violente crisi economiche: le carestie come i momenti di disoccupazione contribuivano all'emarginazione. Tuttavia, gli accidenti della vita, le malattie invalidanti o la vedovanza contavano assai di più. La povertà risultava inoltre legata a movimenti profondi di mobilità sociale discendente che caratterizzano non solo la società del tardo Medioevo in preda a gravi difficoltà, ma anche, per altri motivi, quella del Medioevo centrale.

¹³ Feller, "Un évêque."

3. *La povertà lavorativa in un'economia in via di sviluppo*

Nella società urbana del Medioevo centrale, lo sviluppo dell'industria, in particolare quella tessile, ebbe conseguenze complesse e di vasta portata.¹⁴ La crescente divisione del lavoro e la diversificazione delle mansioni da svolgere portarono a un aumento del lavoro non qualificato. Nelle città, non tutti i lavoratori erano 'incorporati', inseriti, cioè, in un'arte, e non tutti potevano approfittare di un apprendimento. Tutti i lavoratori poco o non qualificati erano dunque costretti ad accettare mansioni poco o mal remunerate nel quadro di reclutamenti giornalieri, a seconda delle necessità dei datori di lavoro. Non si sa con esattezza quanti erano questi lavoratori 'non incorporati' né quale percentuale della popolazione essi rappresentavano: si indovina però che si trattava della maggioranza degli operai, quelli che, ogni giorno, aspettavano in piazza che il proprietario di un'officina venisse a offrire del lavoro e un salario senza sapere se, l'indomani, sarebbero stati nuovamente assunti.¹⁵

Solo i contratti con una durata specificata fin dall'inizio potevano dare una qualche forma di sicurezza: nella documentazione medievale sono rari e dovevano essere spesso orali. Soprattutto, sono difficili da distinguere dai contratti di apprendimento dato che le situazioni di lavoro dipendente si possono facilmente confondere con quelle di effettiva dipendenza e di servitù.¹⁶ Le condizioni di lavoro dei manovali descritti da de La Roncière si caratterizzavano per la discontinuità delle assunzioni e per la brevità degli impieghi dei manovali:¹⁷ per sopravvivere, questi operai dovevano trovare più datori di lavoro e solo molto raramente potevano entrare in una squadra che assicurasse loro una certa regolarità d'impiego. L'assenza di qualifiche aveva conseguenze anche per gli immigrati, che non avevano altra scelta che aggiungersi alla fila di questi gruppi di lavoratori esposti alla disoccupazione, costretti ad accettare qualsiasi compito e, soprattutto, condizioni di lavoro dure e spesso umilianti. Un esempio celebre è quello dei Ciompi che, posti ai limiti esterni della città di Firenze, spesso nell'Oltarno, vi svolgevano attività sporche, faticose e penose.

Gli obblighi del sottoposto o dell'impiegato potevano essere estesi all'estremo fino ad assomigliare a degli obblighi di tipo feudale e senza limiti: di fatto, la relazione lavorativa basata sul salario descrive situazioni che non possono essere paragonate a quelle posteriori alla rivoluzione industriale. Inoltre, la posizione concreta degli operai era resa più incerta o più complessa dal problema dell'indebitamento. Questo era legato al consumo ed era spesso il datore di lavoro a esserne il creditore. Si creava allora una specie di servitù che non poteva essere interrotta finché il debito non veniva ripagato con il lavoro: l'impiegato che aveva dovuto chiedere degli anticipi semplicemente non

¹⁴ Piccini, "All'apogeo."

¹⁵ Geremek, *Le salariat*.

¹⁶ Bernardi, *Maître, valet et apprenti*, 120-1.

¹⁷ de La Roncière, *Prix et salaires*, 333-50.

poteva più andarsene prima del rimborso totale e dell'azzeramento del suo conto. Era veramente prigioniero del suo creditore.

I processi di accumulazione della ricchezza e di sviluppo urbano hanno portato all'emarginazione politica dei lavoratori poco o per nulla qualificati, esclusi dalle arti e da qualsiasi partecipazione alla vita politica. Per di più, si mantenevano in uno stato di miseria anche fisica a causa dell'inadeguatezza, il più delle volte, dei salari reali e della durezza delle relazioni sociali all'interno delle città: in questo senso, la Peste Nera non sembra aver portato alcun cambiamento duraturo. Contrariamente a quanto supposto e a quanto detto finora, infatti, la crisi demografica, con la scomparsa di un terzo o della metà della popolazione europea, non creò subito le condizioni di una 'età d'oro' del salariato. Gli stipendi si alzarono solamente durante il decennio 1350-60, conoscendo già un'erosione molto sensibile tra 1370-80.¹⁸ Inoltre, il ritorno della Peste e delle crisi cerealicole negli anni Settanta del Trecento, ben studiate per Firenze, accrebbero le difficoltà dei meno abbienti. Il movimento dei Ciompi mostra la profondità della frustrazione dei lavoratori poveri dopo due decenni di miglioramenti.

Se la congiuntura economica esercitava un ruolo prevalente, le politiche definite e svolte dai ceti dirigenti accrescevano o diminuivano le difficoltà dei poveri. I membri delle élite urbane stabilivano e consolidavano il proprio potere sui gruppi dominati e sottomessi – che spesso depredavano già senza alcun ritegno – attraverso pratiche e dinamiche che impoverivano questi ultimi sempre di più. Pensiamo all'esempio di Douai e di Jehan Boinebroke († 1286 ca.): questi, non solo era il datore di lavoro, ma era anche il proprietario delle case e un creditore importante dei propri lavoratori. Inoltre, Boinebroke faceva parte dei consigli della città – di cui divenne scabino più volte – contribuendo alla stesura dei regolamenti che organizzavano il lavoro e ne stabilivano la retribuzione.¹⁹ Apparteneva infine al gruppo che controllava i tribunali ed era quindi sia giudice sia parte in causa nelle controversie tra i maestri tessitori e i mercanti di stoffe. In questo modo, non c'era scampo: nessuna lotta poteva essere vittoriosa a lungo termine. Gli scioperi e i movimenti sociali per le rivendicazioni salariali furono schiacciati senza ritegno: il *taskehan* di Douai del 1276 e la sua repressione ne sono un esempio.²⁰

Di conseguenza, come è stato spesso osservato, in città si diffuse un gruppo particolarmente vulnerabile, quello dei lavoratori a giornata: operai che vivevano esclusivamente del loro salario, a sua volta appena sufficiente a garantire la sopravvivenza di un uomo. I membri di questo gruppo erano minacciati dalla disoccupazione e dalla mancanza di reddito che questa comportava. Erano dunque esposti a tutte le fluttuazioni economiche: i forti aumenti dei prezzi dei cereali e i salari mediocri assicuravano un tenore di vita

¹⁸ de La Roncière, *Prix et Salaires*, 455-61.

¹⁹ Espinas, *Les origines*, 165-6.

²⁰ Sull'atmosfera sociale a Douai alla fine del XIII secolo: Feller, "La fête faillie."

costantemente basso, costringendoli a fare scelte dolorose in fatto di consumi. La stima nei loro confronti era minima e per descriverli si usavano parole sprezzanti, così come frasi offensive per stigmatizzarne le azioni intraprese per migliorare le proprie condizioni di vita. Erano anche la preda dei datori di lavoro, che esercitavano la loro prepotenza sociale con i mezzi più vari: il potere di questi ultimi può giustamente essere qualificato come pervasivo, in quanto toccava tutti gli aspetti della vita sociale, economica e anche privata dei loro sottoposti.

Bisogna però sottolineare alcuni aspetti che fanno da contraltare. Malgrado la loro durezza, i ceti dirigenti erano composti da cristiani che conoscevano il valore e l'importanza della carità per la salvezza della loro anima. Erano anche consapevoli della necessità di mantenere l'armonia nella città: non si poteva lasciar sviluppare situazioni che avrebbero portato alla dissoluzione dell'ordine sociale e politico della *civitas*. Per questi motivi, dappertutto, si svilupparono politiche che miravano a mantenere una forma di equilibrio tra risorse e bisogni, soprattutto nelle questioni di approvvigionamento alimentare. Si trattava di carità: non si poteva lasciare la gente morire di fame senza fare nulla. Di conseguenza, le autorità laiche così come le persone private presero in mano il problema delle distribuzioni alimentari in caso di necessità. Nel nord della Francia le cosiddette *Tables des Pauvres*, mense dei poveri, si moltiplicarono già nel XIII secolo, mentre i re e principi sviluppavano delle *Aumôneries* all'interno delle loro residenze.²¹ La Chiesa, ovviamente, aveva le sue istituzioni come a Barcellona la *Pia Almoïna* o ad Avignone la *Pignotta*. Per quanto riguarda gli ospedali, la loro gestione divenne progressivamente appannaggio dei laici, appoggiati dai rispettivi comuni: ad Avignone, nel XIV secolo, l'ospedale di Saint Benezet era gestito da artigiani e imprenditori come Jehan Tesseire.²² Le realizzazioni più brillanti da questo punto di vista furono però quelle dei fiorentini che, sviluppando l'amministrazione dell'Abbondanza, non solo contribuivano a sostenere i più deboli, ma lo facevano intervenendo sul mercato dei cereali seppur rispettandone il funzionamento.²³ Oltre alla compassione per le sofferenze dei più sprovvisi di beni e alla preoccupazione per il bene pubblico e l'onore della città – che esigeva di non lasciare la gente morire di fame –, vi era infatti anche la cura degli interessi privati e la volontà di non dovere rialzare i salari nel caso in cui i cereali raggiungessero prezzi troppo elevati.

Il pauperismo è quindi organicamente legato allo sviluppo delle città e alla diversificazione delle attività che vi si svolgono, in particolare quelle manifatturiere, dove l'impiego di una manodopera abbondante è una necessità e la sua economicità un vantaggio. L'industria tessile, forse l'esempio più immediato, comportava infatti un gran numero di piccoli lavori non qualificati,

²¹ Mollat, *Les pauvres*, 165-75.

²² Dubois Morestin, *Être entrepreneur au Moyen Âge*.

²³ de la Roncière, *Prix et salaires*, 569-86.

ripetitivi, sporchi e faticosi, ma che non richiedevano particolari conoscenze o abilità. Questo tipo di lavoro non aveva una dignità particolare e chi lo svolgeva era destinato a una totale mancanza di riconoscimento sociale e di considerazione, ovvero di *fama*.²⁴

4. *Impoverimento*

La mobilità sociale medievale esisteva ed era sia ascendente che discendente: c'erano rare ascensioni sociali e più frequenti movimenti di declassamento. Le condizioni socio-economiche non erano bloccate e le disuguaglianze si potevano creare o accrescere in ambiti di tempo ristretti, a causa delle crisi o di una congiuntura negativa.²⁵ Tuttavia, è necessario sollevare due questioni fondamentali: la cronologia e gli effetti immediati dell'impoverimento da un lato, e il problema dei trasferimenti ereditari dall'altro. La povertà è anche un'eredità. Durante il Medioevo si osservano più periodi di crisi generale – che hanno come conseguenza declassamenti e riclassificazioni degli individui e dei gruppi –, a loro volta connessi alla periodizzazione interna al millennio medievale.²⁶

Senza voler né poter sorvolare l'intero Medioevo, si deve rammentare come la questione dell'impoverimento generale della società o di alcuni delle sue componenti (o di tutte) abbia attraversato la storiografia europea e si trovi, in fondo, all'origine di tutte le nostre periodizzazioni. Il passaggio dall'Antichità al Medioevo è spesso visto come il momento in cui le élite sociali si ricompongono sulla base della ristrettezza dei loro mezzi economici e sulla costruzione di nuovi criteri di distinzione sociale, che mettono l'accento sulle gerarchie e sulla vicinanza al potere dei sovrani. Per quanto riguarda la società contadina, il periodo che va dalla fine delle strutture politiche del mondo romano fino al consolidamento del potere carolingio può essere considerato un periodo dorato, di libertà e di relativo benessere. Le cose cambiano con l'apparizione della volontà dei sovrani e delle aristocrazie e con la loro capacità di costruire dominazioni politiche che implicano l'inserimento dei contadini nella loro dipendenza. Questo movimento, iniziato molto presto – al più tardi verso l'VIII secolo –, accelera durante l'XI – con il rafforzamento dei poteri locali e il consolidamento della signoria territoriale –, determinando un generale impoverimento dei contadini e allargando il fossato sociale già esistente tra i detentori del potere e i loro sudditi. Ci fu, di conseguenza, durante il periodo fra VIII e XI secolo, un lungo processo di deterioramento dello status e della ricchezza dei sudditi e un allargamento della distanza sociale ed economica esistente tra dominati e dominati. In questa visione, il processo

²⁴ Mollat, *Les pauvres*, 198-202; Todeschini, *Au pays des sans-nom*.

²⁵ Sul tema della mobilità sociale, si veda Carocci, *La mobilità sociale*.

²⁶ Per l'alto Medioevo Bougard, Le Jan, "Quelle mobilité."

appare lento e non segue la linea temporale degli avventi eventi, trasformazioni politici, per quanto gravi possano essere. Comunque, l'allontanamento progressivo tra dominati e dominanti non impedì lo sviluppo di un ulteriore processo, quello della differenziazione sociale all'interno del mondo rurale, nel quale la ricchezza e il modo in cui questa veniva acquisita e trasmessa giocò un ruolo essenziale.

Il tardo Medioevo fu un altro periodo critico. Nel mondo rurale si osservano le conseguenze del processo di differenziazione in corso almeno dall'XI secolo e il deterioramento delle condizioni di vita risulta generale ed evidente già prima della Peste Nera. Negli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, Guy Fourquin stimò che tra la metà del XIII e la metà del XIV secolo la dimensione media delle aziende agricole dei contadini dell'Île de France era scesa al di sotto della soglia dei cinque ettari, cioè al di sotto della superficie necessaria alla sopravvivenza di coloro che le coltivavano.²⁷ La crescita demografica e la divisione egualitaria dell'eredità nella regione avevano creato questa situazione, costringendo i contadini a capo di aziende agricole non redditizie a cercare lavori minori per trovare un reddito aggiuntivo. Si aggravava perciò il fenomeno ben conosciuto e ben studiato della pluriattività, che caratterizzava la vita delle classi subalterne nel Medioevo. I lavori agricoli, come la partecipazione all'attività delle squadre di lavoratori che ogni estate mietevano il grano, o ancora la pratica dei lavori più diversi, come lo scavo di un pozzo, la pulitura dei fossati o semplicemente la spigolatura, procuravano qualche somma o una piccola quota del raccolto, modesta ma importante per la sopravvivenza dei lavoratori. Anche nelle città la pluriattività, che accompagnava il carattere discontinuo dell'impiego per la stagionalità di alcuni lavori, specialmente nei cantieri edili, è frequente. Ciò non impedisce ai lavoratori non specializzati di vivere spesso ai limiti della fame e di subire comunque le conseguenze di redditi spesso troppo deboli per poter mantenere una famiglia. In questi casi, l'arte di arrangiarsi e di tirare avanti significa essere in grado di inserirsi nelle reti clientelari e di approfittare della protezione dei padroni. È spesso compito delle mogli ricercare aiuti materiali e percorrere la città per domandare presso i casati più agiati cibo o denaro per completare il reddito del lavoro del marito.²⁸

Nei casi più estremi si può arrivare fino ai furti di cibo, che sembrano diventare più frequenti quando arriva una crisi. La scusa della necessità era spesso accettata: i giurisperiti la definivano tollerabile, ma non sempre i tribunali la accoglievano.²⁹ Più frequentemente, e meno drammaticamente, i consumatori poveri della città erano indotti a scegliere ciò che era essenziale per la loro dieta e ad abbassare la qualità del loro fabbisogno. A Firenze il pane con farina di frumento veniva abbandonato quando i prezzi divenivano troppo alti, passando allora a quello di farro, grigio e meno apprezzato sia

²⁷ Fourquin, *Les campagnes*, 94-5.

²⁸ de la Roncière, "Pauvres et pauvreté."

²⁹ Gauvard, *De grâce especial*, 400-10.

socialmente sia in termini di gusto. I fiorentini restavano tuttavia molto riluttanti a mangiare un pane diverso da quello di frumento e protestavano contro le autorità quando non se ne trovava più a sufficienza sul mercato.³⁰

Nell'Europa settentrionale, la grande crisi del 1316-22 con i ripetuti episodi di alti prezzi dei generi alimentari mise in luce gravi difficoltà generali, che colpirono soprattutto le classi lavoratrici ma che portarono anche a un calo generale della produzione. La sequenza di scarsi raccolti e i conseguenti prezzi elevati delle derrate alimentari finirono per erodere il capitale circolante dei contadini più poveri che, dopo aver venduto i loro raccolti, si trovarono nell'impossibilità materiale di rimettere in produzione le loro aziende. Questi contadini, infatti, si trovarono spesso nell'obbligo di vendere appezzamenti di terra per poter saldare i loro debiti o, il che è lo stesso, comprare delle derrate alimentari.³¹ L'impoverimento, in questo caso, era legato alla mancanza di denaro, all'impossibilità di mobilitare un risparmio e alla perdita brutale della proprietà dei mezzi di produzione, terra e bestiame. I contadini impoveriti vennero esclusi dall'accesso ai beni di consumo più elementari, per mancanza di titoli (salari, terra, bestiame, denaro...) sufficienti ad accedervi, secondo considerazioni ormai pienamente accettate. L'inadeguatezza di questi titoli, che costituivano il diritto di accesso (*entitlements*, secondo la definizione di Amartya Sen) a un mercato (in questo caso dei cereali), erano una delle principali cause di esclusione e un segno dell'impoverimento generale che precedeva la carestia e ne era a sua volta una delle cause.³²

L'impoverimento, tuttavia, precedeva l'inadeguatezza della produzione alimentare e non era causato da un singolo fattore esterno all'attore economico (come gli accidenti meteorologici che innescano il processo di aumento dei prezzi dei prodotti alimentari) ma da un'altra motivazione, assai più complessa: la carenza cronica di mezzi di pagamento per l'acquisto dei beni, che costringeva le persone a liquidare il proprio capitale. In altre parole, la povertà aggravava le situazioni in cui il cibo veniva prodotto e distribuito in quantità insufficienti, mettendo i produttori in situazioni impossibili e innescando le crisi. Aggravava pure la distanza fra poveri e benestanti: con i primi colpiti più duramente dalle crisi che li costringevano a cedere il loro capitale in terra o in bestiami. A l'Aquila, durante la carestia del 1330, i contadini, dopo aver sacrificato il bestiame, divenuto invendibile a causa del crollo dei prezzi della carne, cedettero in massa le loro terre agli abitanti delle città, contribuendo così a modificare la struttura sociale della regione e condannandosi, inoltre, all'emigrazione o all'accettazione di contratti agrari estremamente sfavorevoli.³³

In questo senso, il problema dell'accesso alla proprietà e della possibilità di trasmetterla senza diminuirla era essenziale. Essere esclusi della proprietà

³⁰ Pinto, *Il libro del Biadaiolo*.

³¹ Jordan, *The great famine*, 87-96.

³² Sen, *Poverty*, 45-52.

³³ Feller, "Les chertés."

o essere a capo di un'azienda agricola troppo piccola significava essere condannati a vivere di elemosina, a dipendere dai salari o a dover accettare condizioni contrattuali dure per un appezzamento di terra. Inoltre, costringeva a contrarre debiti: si tratta di un tema ricorrente nella storiografia. L'eccessivo indebitamento e la conseguente impossibilità a saldarlo potevano spingere a lasciare la propria azienda e a cercare un'altra terra abbastanza lontana per non essere ritrovati dal creditore o dalle autorità giudiziarie incaricate della persecuzione dei debitori. Vivere nel debito non era sempre un problema: talvolta il creditore non voleva recuperare rapidamente il denaro che aveva prestato dato che il legame stabilito dal debito poteva essere più vantaggioso del suo rimborso. D'altro canto, quest'ultimo poteva sempre essere ottenuto chiedendo la cessione di uno o più terreni.³⁴

La fuga del debitore poteva anticiparne lo sfratto e poteva svolgersi in più tappe o episodi. Lo scopo iniziale era ritrovare altrove le condizioni di lavoro e di esistenza appena lasciate. Se questo non era possibile, allora ci si recava in città, dove il declassamento era un rischio concreto: le competenze di un contadino difficilmente venivano valorizzate nell'economia cittadina, tranne il caso in cui fossero legate all'artigianato o all'alimentazione. Così, a Brescia, gli immigrati provenienti dalla montagna, già inseriti nelle reti di fabbricazione e commercializzazione del formaggio o della carne, trovavano lavoro in molteplici attività, mentre quelli provenienti dalla Bassa, che avevano come unica competenza il lavoro della terra, erano impiegati nei livelli più bassi dell'artigianato. Senza appoggio familiare e senza il sostegno di una rete di amicizie non potevano conoscere che il declassamento.³⁵

L'emigrazione del XII secolo, dunque, non fu sempre propria dei ceti dominanti del villaggio, ma portò anche all'impoverimento, se non alla miseria: le qualifiche professionali e sociali del mondo rurale erano molto più difficili da utilizzare in città e spesso, ma non sempre, causavano il declassamento dei migranti. Questi erano condannati a lavori non qualificati e mal pagati e alla povertà come risultato di un duplice fenomeno di dequalificazione e 'disaffiliazione'. La perdita di una posizione professionale e sociale, nonché dei legami familiari o di amicizia che sostengono e aiutano le persone e le famiglie nei momenti difficili, segnava l'inizio di dinamiche assai difficili da superare. Si tratta di una delle trappole della povertà, per riprendere la metafora usata da Esther Duflo,³⁶ da cui era ed è quasi impossibile uscire, anche con il sostegno delle istituzioni caritatevoli: queste potevano solo reiterare il loro aiuto senza poter fornire i mezzi atti a evitare che gli individui rimanessero in situazioni di degrado.

La congiuntura, inoltre, è importante. Fu soprattutto la guerra che, alla fine del Medioevo, finì per avere effetti strutturali quando la distruzione da

³⁴ Si veda de La Roncière, *Un changeur florentin*, 96-112.

³⁵ Menant, *Campagnes lombardes*, 274-6.

³⁶ Banerjee, Duflo, *Repenser la pauvreté*, 30-9.

semplice accidente divenne sistematica, distruggendo i capitali, le infrastrutture produttive e le ricchezze mobiliari di interi paesi. Gli effetti strutturali della guerra si ebbero anche con il suo finanziamento, quando i governi crearono e poi aumentarono le tasse esercitando una pressione fiscale spesso difficile da sopportare, come in Provenza all'inizio del XIV secolo.³⁷ La guerra contribuì infine alla dissoluzione delle solidarietà tradizionali facendo emergere un nuovo tipo di povertà, legata alla difficoltà di far fronte alle nuove richieste fiscali e alle espropriazioni che ne potevano derivare.

Infine, anche la forza della signoria conta: abbiamo già visto come l'ipotesi di un impoverimento generale dei contadini alla fine dell'alto Medioevo debba essere fortemente sfumata. Anche nel XV secolo, quando intere regioni furono caratterizzate dalla scarsità degli uomini e dall'abbondanza delle terre da rimettere in uso, un esame dei contratti agrari dimostra come le condizioni concesse agli affittuari di terre potessero rimanere stabili. Lungi dal moltiplicare le esenzioni e gli sgravi, alcuni signori, cercando di ricostruire il proprio patrimonio così come era prima della crisi e il proprio reddito come era prima della Peste,³⁸ imposero condizioni simili a quelle del XIV secolo. È il caso di una regione dell'Île de France, nel Vexin, dove a partire dagli anni Cinquanta del Quattrocento le signorie ecclesiastiche non apportarono alcuna modifica alla loro gestione o al loro sistema di prelievi. Di fatto, mantennero i piccoli contadini in uno stato di povertà permanente mentre il gruppo dei grandi agricoltori godette di un aumento costante delle rendite che permise loro di costruire posizioni solide e stabili. Altri proprietari agirono diversamente e, ristrutturando le proprie aziende, adottarono modalità di gestione più redditizie: in Francia, nella Haute-Marche, la mezzadria rimpiazzò il vecchio sistema signorile e permise, mediante una modifica radicale dei paesaggi agrari, di aumentare la ricchezza prodotta e di creare un ceto contadino assai ricco.³⁹

5. Lavoratori agricoli e solidarietà

L'aiuto reciproco, la solidarietà familiare o comunitaria, la divisione e la specializzazione del lavoro e la posizione all'interno di un gruppo di età giocavano un ruolo importante nei processi di squalifica o qualifica sociale e creavano condizioni diseguali tra chi accedeva a questi vantaggi e chi invece non poteva. Lavorare come bracciante agricolo, domestico, mandriano o aratore in una casa padronale o in una grande fattoria poteva essere dovuto al fatto di non avere sostegni o qualsiasi altra forma di aiuto. L'assoluta necessità di ottenere subito cibo e alloggio e, alla fine dell'anno, un reddito pecuniario – per quanto limitato – era ovviamente la causa dell'accettazione di condizioni

³⁷ Baratier, *La démographie*.

³⁸ Alard-Bonhoure, "Le prix de la relance."

³⁹ Glomot, *Héritage*.

spesso umilianti. L'età, il sesso come le condizioni stesse all'ingresso nella vita avevano un ruolo importante: le giovani ragazze venivano collocate nelle grandi fattorie per svolgere i lavori domestici. Non si trattava di un lavoro che avrebbero mantenuto per il resto della loro vita, ma di un posto in cui attendere il matrimonio.

Dal canto loro, i giovani assunti tutto l'anno per mansioni specializzate potevano anche essere presenti solo per brevi periodi, completando il loro apprendistato professionale su terreni altrui in un'organizzazione del lavoro in cui i ragazzi si spostavano da un'azienda agricola all'altra. Il reddito aggiuntivo fornito dal salario poteva aiutarli a raggiungere un certo grado di benessere e a preparare l'insediamento definitivo in una tenuta agricola. Come già detto in precedenza, il salario poteva integrare un reddito altrimenti sicuro ma insufficiente: fu così almeno fino alla Peste Nera, quando le condizioni di contrattazione divennero favorevoli ai lavoratori e la situazione cambiò completamente nonostante la resistenza delle strutture signorili.

Nel mondo rurale, il lavoro retribuito era un mezzo per aumentare il reddito ed entrava in gioco in momenti specifici del ciclo di vita. Rappresentava una forma di precauzione ed era visto come un rimedio ai rischi e all'incertezza, come un modo di regolarli. Allo stesso tempo, nelle città, gli statuti delle confraternite e dei mestieri prevedevano il rischio di sventure e di circostanze avverse offrendo rimedi imperfetti ma reali sotto forma di assistenza reciproca. Questa assistenza si attivava in caso di malattia o d'infermità e permetteva di ritardare il ricorso alle istituzioni caritatevoli o, addirittura, di evitarle del tutto.

La solidarietà e la protezione si esercitavano anche in altri modi. A Firenze, ad esempio, la politica annonaria era finalizzata essenzialmente a garantire la continuità delle forniture ai mercati. Inoltre, obbediva a una logica di mantenimento dell'ordine costituito: le tensioni che potevano portare a disordini dovevano essere contenute a qualsiasi costo. L'effetto di queste politiche, che miravano in primo luogo a garantire la stabilità politica della città, era quello di rendere effettivi i titoli posseduti dai lavoratori in virtù del loro salario e di garantire loro il più a lungo possibile il diritto di accesso al mercato alimentare. Reintegrare i lavoratori nel gioco dell'offerta era il massimo che i ceti dominanti medievali potevano fare in materia di uguaglianza.

6. *Vivere in povertà: tra ethos e habitus*

Questa politica aveva degli effetti concreti ma produceva anche ulteriori conseguenze e creava altre disuguaglianze – legate alla distinzione tra i vari ceti sociali – che si manifestavano attraverso il consumo e l'ossessione per le leggi suntuarie.⁴⁰ Fino al XIV secolo consumare carne era una evento raro:

⁴⁰ Si vedano i saggi di Alexis Wilkin e di Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani in questo volume.

quando divenne più comune poteva essere di qualità molto bassa. Le misure adottate per sorvegliare le macellerie a Parigi dimostrano che il grado di freschezza e la natura dei tagli messi in vendita davano origine a diversi canali di commercializzazione, fino ad arrivare alla carne che, sul punto di marcire, poteva essere venduta solo bollita.⁴¹ I cereali costituivano l'alimentazione di base, ma c'era una grande differenza di prezzo e di status tra una pagnotta di grano e una di farro, tra una pagnotta di pane bianco e una di pane grigio o nero. La dieta dei poveri era caratterizzata da modelli di consumo specifici e, ovviamente, dall'assenza di prodotti troppo costosi. Anche l'abbigliamento era uno dei problemi fondamentali da risolvere, trattandosi di un consumo obbligato: era necessario acquistare almeno una parte del proprio guardaroba. In molti casi, i capi di abbigliamento facevano parte della retribuzione offerta ai lavoratori, soprattutto nelle zone rurali. Nei grandi latifondi, alla fine del Medioevo, i pastori, le cameriere e tutti i lavoratori assunti su base annua ricevevano una somma di denaro per l'acquisto di vestiti. Gli abitanti delle città, invece, potevano trovare sul mercato indumenti di ogni tipo e di ogni qualità, dai peggiori stracci agli abiti quasi nuovi.

Il fenomeno estremamente complesso della povertà si rifletteva dunque nell'indigenza, nella cattiva alimentazione, nell'abbigliamento di scarsa qualità, negli alloggi mediocri e nella scarsa protezione dal freddo e dalle intemperie. Tutto questo era il volto più visibile di una società estremamente diseguale, dove le istituzioni dedicate alla solidarietà faticavano a proteggere i più svantaggiati. Al contrario, la ricchezza e, soprattutto, il desiderio di far vedere il proprio posto all'interno della gerarchia sociale, conduceva a degli atteggiamenti di ostentazione che erano ben conosciuti e contro i quali tanto la Chiesa quanto i magistrati hanno lottato attraverso disposizioni legislative ripetute in un modo ossessivo e sicuramente poco efficiente.⁴² Il vestito era il segno più ovvio e più clamoroso della disuguaglianza tra gli uomini e le donne, assegnando ciascuno o ciascuna a un ceto o a un gruppo determinato. Questa disuguaglianza, però, era rafforzata dalla condizione economica delle donne e dalle minacce che gli eventi della vita, in particolare la vedovanza, rappresentavano per loro. Al di là della mera questione economica, si tratta, attraverso la questione dello status femminile di definire le condizioni materiali e morali della dominazione maschile.

7. Uomini e donne: alcuni aspetti economici della dominazione maschile

La povertà femminile è un aspetto specifico della disuguaglianza di genere.⁴³ La prima e la più importante ineguaglianza è senza dubbio quella che ri-

⁴¹ Descamps, "Sera veu et extimé."

⁴² Muzzarelli, "Introduzione," 7-14.

⁴³ Per questo paragrafo si veda Feller, "Introduction. La pauvreté des femmes" e, più in generale: Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà*.

guarda la proprietà delle donne, sia essa la dote o i beni paterni. La dote, come è noto, doveva essere restituita alla vedova, che si trovava quindi a competere con i propri figli e a subire pressioni molteplici e contraddittorie. Nell'alto Medioevo, sia nelle società urbane che in quelle rurali, si trattava di un problema reale. Innanzitutto, la dote doveva essere costituita e pagata. L'unione coniugale, che fosse consuetudinaria o benedetta *in facie ecclesiae*, era la posizione obbligatoria per le donne. Si tratta di un punto cruciale, perché il matrimonio è una componente essenziale nella costruzione del dominio sulle donne da parte degli uomini e una delle chiavi della loro sottomissione. In caso di vedovanza, e se la dote fosse stata restituita, il matrimonio avrebbe potuto fornire un'ultima protezione contro la povertà più abietta: tuttavia, raramente le vedove riuscivano a mantenere lo status economico e sociale raggiunto attraverso i mariti. La vedovanza comportava necessariamente una perdita di reddito, anche per le persone più agiate, e negli ambienti artigianali non era sempre legalmente possibile per una vedova continuare il lavoro del marito, poiché l'accesso ai mestieri era spesso molto restrittivo. Nelle coppie artigiane, la vendita più o meno forzata della bottega comportava la necessità di trovare soluzioni alternative, che portavano a una nuova definizione del nucleo familiare, in assenza dell'uomo e con un reddito molto ridotto. Il nucleo familiare composto da una famiglia nucleare che viveva nella propria abitazione era normalmente la prima linea di protezione offerta agli individui, in particolare alle donne: forniva sia un riparo materiale che una protezione morale ed emotiva. Questa protezione era messa in discussione dalla morte del marito, che portava a un impoverimento che a volte si spingeva molto in là, mettendo a rischio la sopravvivenza dei figli. L'affidamento dei figli, o addirittura il loro abbandono, poteva essere l'unica soluzione a disposizione della madre per garantire la propria sopravvivenza fisica, ma esponeva i bambini a rischi vitali.

Uno dei primi effetti della caduta in povertà era la misura della capacità delle famiglie allargate di fornire sostegno materiale alle vedove in difficoltà e ai loro figli. È qui che entra in gioco la rete di amici e conoscenti del vicinato. Nelle aree urbane, in particolare nella Parigi del XIII secolo, i gruppi di donne che condividevano la stessa abitazione erano visti come una forma di protezione e una soluzione disperata, utilizzata quando non vi erano alternative.⁴⁴ Formalizzato e inquadrato da norme e consuetudini, anche il ritiro nei beghinaggi o negli ospizi era una soluzione, più vicina al velo richiesto dalle autorità religiose dell'alto Medioevo che alla semplice messa in comune di risorse. Se queste soluzioni non erano possibili, la sanzione immediata era l'emarginazione, con il suo corollario, la prostituzione, vista come ultima spiaggia. La spirale sociale si concludeva in una delle istituzioni caritatevoli della città, in particolare nelle case per ragazze pentite.

Come detto in precedenza, le famiglie povere non avevano altra scelta che moltiplicare le loro attività. Qualunque fosse il mestiere dell'uomo, doveva

⁴⁴ Farmer, *Surviving poverty*.

essere integrato con altre entrate. Queste erano fornite dal lavoro della moglie o dalla sua capacità di sfruttare le opportunità offerte dalla generosità delle élite. Come ci si aspetterebbe, il lavoro delle donne è multiforme. Oltre alle mansioni domestiche, assistevano i mariti nella loro occupazione principale, aiutando nella bottega o svolgendo lo stesso lavoro di un artigiano o di un operaio, anche nei cantieri edili. Quando vediamo le donne al lavoro, ci chiediamo quanto venissero pagate: le qualità richieste per uno stipendio alto escludevano le donne da una serie di lavori meglio remunerati e le relegavano a mansioni umili, poco visibili e poco retribuite. Nelle campagne, invece, i guadagni delle donne sono osservabili nelle grandi squadre per la vendemmia e la pigiatura dell'uva. In questo contesto, il lavoro loro affidato mostra una differenziazione di genere che portava le donne e le ragazze a essere pagate meno degli uomini.⁴⁵ Il lavoro accessorio, dal canto suo, era sempre scarsamente retribuito, quando lo era: non di rado il pagamento del salario dei servi veniva differito fino alla fine del periodo di lavoro, assumendo la forma di un regolamento di conti generale in cui le piccole somme anticipate dal datore di lavoro nel corso del contratto, oltre a qualche prestazione in natura, finivano per pesare molto. Non è da escludere che le domestiche non riuscissero ad accumulare una somma che gli permettesse di uscire dalla loro condizione e di sistemarsi.

Il lavoro femminile poteva spaziare da quello altamente specializzato e creatore di valore, come nel caso delle lavoratrici della seta parigine, a quello più semplice, come il lavoro domestico o quello quotidiano, combinato con l'attività ordinaria di una donna, ovvero la filatura della lana. In una delle sue novelle, Boccaccio ci presenta i ritratti incrociati di una filatrice e del tessitore che le porta la lana grezza per poi tesserne il filo, dando vita a una storia d'amore.⁴⁶ In ogni caso, il lavoro era visto come la normale sorte delle donne, complementare a quella dei mariti o dei padri, ed essenziale per il reddito familiare. A Firenze, come detto in precedenza, era compito della donna, in una famiglia di poveri vergognosi, partire alla ricerca di aiuto, rivolgendosi prima alle principali istituzioni caritatevoli e poi a potenziali datori di lavoro e protettori, attivando le reti verticali che poteva avere o trovare.⁴⁷ In casi estremi, questo approccio poteva andare ben oltre, arrivando all'accattonaggio di strada, umiliante e degradante. Le persone che rientravano nella categoria dei poveri vergognosi, e che noi classificheremmo facilmente come parte della categoria più contemporanea dei lavoratori poveri, subivano un deterioramento del loro status che si rifletteva sull'autostima della coppia e sulla reputazione nel quartiere in cui vivevano. Tuttavia, è soprattutto la donna a subire lo stigma dell'impoverimento e del declassamento, a cui si esponeva pubblicamente con le sue azioni.

⁴⁵ Feller, "Pauvreté et travail des femmes."

⁴⁶ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, IV, 7.

⁴⁷ de La Roncière, "Pauvres et Pauvreté."

Qualunque sia l'intensità del dominio esercitato dagli uomini sulle donne e qualunque sia la profondità della loro sottomissione, resta il fatto che esse hanno una propria capacità di iniziativa e di reazione, un'*agency* che permetta loro di migliorare la propria sorte. Le schiave, così numerose nel tardo Medioevo, ne sono un esempio notevole, se non emblematico. L'ingresso delle schiave nella famiglia proprietaria aveva un costo enorme per loro. Sradicate, spesso rapite e strappate dal paese d'origine, talvolta vendute addirittura dai parenti, subivano l'ultima umiliazione con l'ingresso nella nuova condizione. Tuttavia, poteva accadere che acquisissero un posto nella casa che, dopo essere stata esclusivamente un luogo di sfruttamento, si rivelasse accogliente. Ma è anche attraverso la sottomissione, e più precisamente la sottomissione sessuale, che la condizione della donna, prima oggetto di desiderio e poi possibile oggetto di affetto, poteva migliorare. Non vi è nulla di nuovo o di sorprendente, e la degradazione primitiva, l'accettazione della propria infamia, era una condizione necessaria per accedere a condizioni materiali migliori, prima di, eventualmente, poter aspirare all'emancipazione.

L'*agency*, tuttavia, poteva anche essere ingannevole, come si comprende in maniera efficace quando le donne parlano da sole e accedono alla sfera delle parole. Le suppliche che rivolgono alle autorità comunali o di altro tipo per ottenere sgravi fiscali o condoni danno accesso alla rappresentazione che le donne davano di sé, anche nelle parole di altri, in questo caso spesso notai, cioè uomini. I discorsi e le argomentazioni utilizzate mostrano come la loro debolezza potesse essere sfruttata a loro vantaggio. I discorsi delle donne ne mostrano l'adesione a tutti quei valori che strutturano il campo ideologico, e in particolare a quelli che definiscono l'onesto e il disonesto, e ciò che è adatto alla componente femminile della società. Invocare il rispetto delle virtù femminili per ottenere un vantaggio è un gioco pulito e mostra i valori sociali a cui si aderisce o a cui si dichiara di aderire nel discorso. Questa adesione, reale o apparente, ha permesso alle donne di ritagliarsi spazi in cui evolversi e sopravvivere nel contesto di impoverimento delle classi lavoratrici del Medioevo centrale e tardo.

In conclusione, in entrambi questi periodi, le donne erano costrette ad accettare la struttura sociale e la sua espressione ideologica per poter sperare di trovare una qualche possibilità di realizzazione. La povertà, dunque, appare come un potente indicatore della debolezza e della sottomissione della donna a un ordine maschile particolarmente oppressivo. La figura della filatrice di Boccaccio, Simone, è qui eloquente: accusata ingiustamente dagli amici del suo amante di averlo ucciso, l'unico 'potere' che le resta per liberarsi da un'accusa che riguarda tanto la sua autonomia – in questo caso la sua libertà sessuale – quanto l'omicidio, è quello di togliersi la vita.

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Social Inequalities and the Great Famine in the County of Flanders (1315-7)

by Mathijs Speecke, Thijs Lambrecht

La Grande Carestia del 1315-7 è uno dei momenti chiave della storia sociale ed economica del Nord Europa nel tardo Medioevo. Le avverse condizioni meteorologiche del 1315-6, combinate con l'elevata pressione demografica, generarono povertà estrema, carestia e una crisi di mortalità. In questo articolo ci concentriamo sull'impatto di questi eventi nei Paesi Bassi e in particolare nelle Fiandre. Nella prima parte presentiamo nuovi dati sugli effetti delle condizioni meteorologiche avverse del 1315 sulla produzione agricola e sui prezzi dei prodotti alimentari. Se ne deduce che le Fiandre fossero particolarmente vulnerabili alle carestie a causa della dipendenza dalle importazioni di grano dalle regioni vicine. La seconda parte si concentra sull'impatto differenziato a livello sociale della carestia. Mentre le grandi aziende agricole riuscirono ad assicurarsi enormi profitti grazie agli alti prezzi dei prodotti alimentari, i piccoli proprietari terrieri furono costretti a vendere le loro aziende per sopravvivere.

The Great Famine of 1315-7 is one of the key moments in the social and economic history of Northern Europe during the late Middle Ages. The adverse weather conditions of 1315-6 combined with high demographic pressures resulted in extreme poverty, famine and ultimately crisis mortality. In this paper we focus on the impact of these events in the Low Countries and the county of Flanders in particular. The aim of our paper is twofold. In the first part, we present new data about the effects of the adverse weather conditions of 1315 on agricultural output and food prices. Our data indicate that Flanders was particularly vulnerable to food shortages and famine due to its reliance on grain import from neighbouring regions. The second part focuses on the socially differentiated impact of the famine. Whereas large farms were able to secure enormous profits due to high food prices, smallholders were forced to sell their holdings to survive.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Fiandre, contadini, Grande Carestia, disuguaglianze.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Flanders, peasants, Great Famine, inequality.

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The Great Famine of 1315-7 is widely regarded as one of the key economic and social turning points in the late medieval history of Northern Europe. In particular, the subsistence crisis is often considered the first in a series of calamitous events that marked the end of a long period of economic and demographic growth, ushering in a new era of crisis and contraction. Since Fritz Curschmann (1900) first drew attention to the Great Famine, the topic has been the subject of several significant studies and monographs, the most recent of which, authored by Philip Slavin, was published in 2019.¹ Whereas older research relied heavily on classical narrative sources and manorial accounts to reconstruct the causes, effects, and chronology of the harvest shortfalls of 1315 and 1316 and the subsequent mortality crisis, more recent studies have benefited from new climatological evidence and the integration of ecological perspectives. For instance, tree-ring analysis has shown that the 1314-6 summer mean represents the fifth wettest three-year summer period over Europe between 1300 and 2012 (or the second wettest if considering only 1300 to 1710). The summer of 1315 ranks among the ten wettest on record for many European countries.² Recent research has also examined the nature, spread and social, economic and ecological impacts of the European ‘cattle panzootic’ or ‘great bovine pestilence’ which followed the subsistence crisis and persisted in Ireland until c. 1325.³ Given the availability of superior source material, most of the historiography on the Great Famine and its aftermath has focused on England. For the Low Countries – cited by contemporary chroniclers as one of the worst affected regions in Europe⁴ – there is only limited historical discussion to match. In 1959, Hans Van Werveke analyzed mass burial accounts from the Flemish cities of Bruges and Ypres. He tentatively calculated that approximately 5,5% of the population of Bruges perished in 1316, compared to 10% or more in Ypres. Van Werveke attributed Bruges’ lower mortality rate to the city’s favorable position within maritime trade networks and its government’s efforts to organize large grain imports

¹ In chronological order of appearance: Curschmann, *Hungersnöte*; Lucas, “The Great European Famine,” 343-77; Kershaw, “The Great Famine,” 3-50; Jordan, *The Great Famine*; Schofield, “Wales and the Great Famine,” 143-67; Slavin, *Experiencing Famine*. See also the reflections in Bourin, Menant, “Les disettes dans la conjoncture de 1300,” 9-33.

² Baek et al., “A Quantitative Hydroclimatic Context,” 1-7.

³ Newfield, “A Cattle Panzootic,” 155-90; Slavin, “The Great Bovine Pestilence,” 1239-66.

⁴ One well-informed chronicler from Lübeck, narrating how in 1316 and 1317 more than 2.300 patients of the Hospital of the Holy Spirit had died and that corpses could be found “on roads, near alleys, in fields and woods, in churches and in the streets”, stated that the hunger and misery there was nothing compared to Zeeland, Holland and Flanders where, in many villages, everyone had perished. According to the chronicler the hardship and hunger in this region “had never been heard nor seen, nor shall there ever be, unless God decrees it” (*Binnen den twee jaren starft to deme hilghen gheste 2300 hostis unde de hunger was so grot, dat men over al in weghen unde bi steghen, in velden unde in busschen, in cercen unde in straten dat vollic dot vant over al. Dese hunger unde dese cummer was en nicht vor dat, dat was in Selant unde in Hollant unde in Vlanderden [...]. Dar weren vele dorpe, dar al vollic in vorstorven weren. De cummer unde de hunger, de dar was, de ne wart ni ghehort noch ghevresschit, noch nummer ene schal, jof Ghot ghebudit. [...]*, cited in Bruns, *Die Chroniken*, 335-6).

from the Mediterranean starting in 1317. By contrast, Ypres, an industrial city reliant on grain imports from its rural hinterland, with a large proletarian population, was more vulnerable to disease and starvation.⁵ Since Van Werveke's seminal study, however, few researchers have tackled the question of the Great Famine in the Low Countries and the County of Flanders in particular. A notable exception is Sam Geens, who utilized confiscation records and arrears of rents in kind owed to the Count of Flanders to assess the exacerbating effects of the Franco-Flemish War of 1314-6 on the subsistence crisis.⁶

This chapter examines the impact of the Great Famine in the northern part of the county of Flanders. Unlike the more inland regions of Flanders, the plains bordering the North Sea were reclaimed relatively late, resulting in the absence of lordship and low levels of surplus extraction by seigneurial elites. In exchange for strong property rights, landowners paid a fixed annual rent (mostly in kind) directly to the Count of Flanders.⁷ Unlike their inland counterparts, rural households in this region were not subject to commutation fees, deathbed taxes or other personal seigneurial obligations.

For Coastal Flanders we have access to a unique combination of sources that allows us to analyse the effects of the Great Famine in detail. In particular, we will address the consequences of the crisis of 1315-7 and its implications for rural households in Coastal Flanders. In the first part, fiscal data are used to reconstruct patterns of peasant landownership in the northwestern Flanders at the onset of the fourteenth century. The second part discusses the impact of adverse weather conditions on agricultural output and price levels. The final section focuses on the experiences of different socio-economic groups and actors in Coastal Flanders during and after the famine.

1. Coastal Flanders c. 1300: a bottom-heavy rural society

Historians have long suspected that population growth in the county of Flanders during the High Middle Ages gave rise to a dramatic increase in the proportion of rural households living near or below subsistence level. However, the scale and impact of this increase remained difficult to determine due to a lack of quantitative records, especially compared to England. Data from expropriations, for example, suggest that small holdings of less than five hectares were already the dominant form of landownership in the Flemish coastal plain by the thirteenth century, but the samples are small and do not necessarily capture all land owned by the individuals.⁸ Additionally, confis-

⁵ Van Werveke, "La famine de l'an 1316," 5-14. We are currently preparing a revision of these mortality rates.

⁶ Geens, "The Great Famine," 1048-72.

⁷ Verhulst, "Die Binnenkolonisation," Lyon, "Medieval Real Estate."

⁸ Soens, *De spade in de dijk?*, 74-5.

cation records drawn up at the end of the Revolt of Coastal Flanders (1323-8) show that 74% of the 3,185 rebels from the rural districts of Furnes, Bergues, Cassel and Bailleul owned 5 'measures' (= 2,27 hectares) of land or less, and another 22% owned between 5 and 20 'measures' (2,27 to 9.09 hectares). Rebels from the northwestern district of Bruges, on the other hand, had access to more than three times as much land per individual compared to the southwestern districts, but these numbers also include leasehold. Moreover, it appears that, unlike the southwestern districts, the officers responsible for the confiscation in the Franc of Bruges only targeted rebels with land worth confiscating.⁹ Thus, while historians agree that the rebels were primarily peasants, it remains to be seen how reliable these confiscation records are as sources for property relations and how representative they are for the Flemish coastal society as a whole.

The identification of new fiscal records, however, confirms that, c. 1300, the vast majority of the rural households in Coastal Flanders depended for their livelihood on small and even minuscule holdings. In the summer of 1304, a land tax of 3 s. *parisis* per 'bunder' or 12 d. *parisis* per 'measure' (one *mesure* equaled c. 0,44 hectares) was levied to cover the military expenses of the ongoing hostilities against France and the counties of Holland and Zeeland. Although most documentation for this land tax is lost, complete tax lists for five villages and another nine incomplete lists survived for the rural district of Bergues (Figure 1).¹⁰ These tax lists are unique because they include all land *owned* by resident households not only in the place of residence itself, but also in surrounding villages, even across district borders. Willaumes Husman, resident of Hondshoote, for example, was taxed 9 shillings for ownership of one 'measure' of land in his place of residence, but also for 5,5 'measures' in the neighbouring village of Killem and 2,5 'measures' in *Capelle Saint Nicholay* (nowadays Oost-Cappel).¹¹ Table 1 shows that roughly 80% of the 1,254 taxpayers owned less than 5 hectares, who together possessed around 43% of the taxed surface area. Land ownership rarely exceeded 10 hectares. In fact, modal land ownership in this district was only 1,32 hectares. (Table 2), which is far below the minimum considered necessary to feed and maintain a household in the Middle Ages even though the yields in the Flemish coastal plain were comparable to those of the most advanced European agricultural districts.¹² The picture that emerges from these tax lists is that of a bottom-heavy rural society characterized by the dominance of small

⁹ For the data, see Pirenne, *Le soulèvement*, 1-162 and Mertens, "Les confiscations," 239-84, subsequently analyzed in TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection*, 139-42.

¹⁰ State Archives of Ghent (SAG), *Graven en gravinnen van Vlaanderen*, Charters, Chronologisch supplement, 510-4; Gaillard, 146, 149, 150. For a more detailed analysis of these tax lists, see: Speecke, Lambrecht, "De nominatieve belastinglijste."

¹¹ SAG, *Graven en gravinnen van Vlaanderen*, Charters, Gaillard, 149.

¹² Based on the accounts of St. John's hospital (Bruges) from the 1360s, Jacques Mertens and Adriaan Verhulst were able to calculate a yield-ratio of 4 to 5 for wheat and a ratio of 6 to 7 for rye, see Mertens, Verhulst, "Yield ratios in Flanders." Only in northern France were yield-ratios

landownership and a high degree of land fragmentation. In that sense, the socio-economic structure that emerges from the fiscal data for the rural district of Bergues was similar to that of densely populated Norfolk (England), where the modal holding size had dropped to no more than 1,21 hectares in the late thirteenth century.¹³

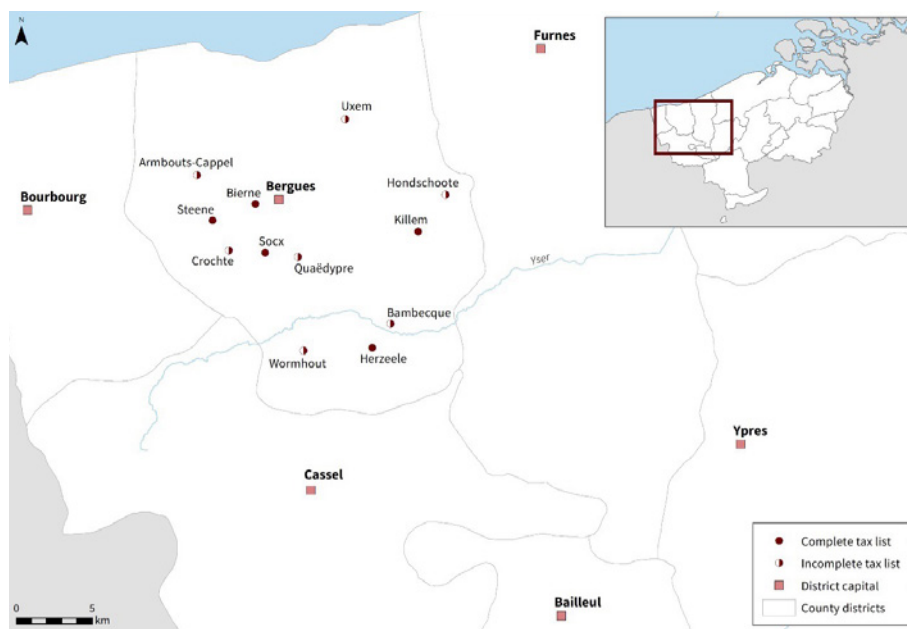


Figure 1. Tax lists preserved for the district of Bergues in the county of Flanders (1304)
Sources: SAG, *Graven en gravinnen van Vlaanderen*, Charters, Chronologisch supplement, 510-4; Gaillard, 146, 149, 150.

Table 1. Land ownership (in hectares) in the district of Bergues in 1304

Land ownership (ha.)	Taxpayers	Taxpayers %	Taxpayers cumulative %	Surface area (ha.)	Surface area %	Surface area cumulative %
<5	1.010	80,5	80,5	1.863,6	43,2	43,2
5-10	168	13,4	93,9	1.171,3	27,1	70,3
10-25	72	5,7	99,7	1.035,3	24	94,3
>25	4	0,3	100	248,1	5,7	100
Total	1.254	100		4.318,3	100	

Sources: see Figure 1.

significantly higher. In the later Middle Ages, the presumed minimum of self-sufficiency was 4 hectares, see Freedman, "Rural society," 83-4.

¹³ Campbell, *The Great Transition*, 184-5.

Table 2. *Central tendency and dispersion of the tax records of the Bergues district in 1304*

Central tendency and dispersion	Land ownership (ha.)
Mean	3,44
Median	1,98
Mode	1,32
Standard deviation	5,4
Min	0,04
Max	132,12

Sources: see Figure 1.

Because the fiscal data from 1304 only record land ownership, the tax lists cannot be used to reconstruct total land use of each household or total holding size. However, indications about land ownership are nevertheless instructive as they strongly suggest that households in this region could not survive from the land they owned directly. In other words, the dominant group of small landowners in this region had to turn to complementary strategies to make ends meet. Most importantly, many of the peasant households in the region of Bergues must have held additional land through leasehold. The confiscation accounts of 1315 (see below) indicate that most persecuted landowners (lay and ecclesiastical) leased the land they owned in this region. Moreover, the pattern of small scale and fragmented landownership in the district of Bergues matches the research of Erik Thoen, Tim Soens and Lies Vervaeet on the origins and development of leasehold in the county of Flanders. Their analysis shows that short-term leasehold developed early in Coastal Flanders and increasingly replaced other forms of tenure in the course of the thirteenth century.¹⁴

While our tax data does not inform us about leasehold, the data strongly indicate that there must have been a high demand for land in this region. Landowners capitalized on this demand by offering small parcels of land through short-term lease. In fact, one of the indicators of an active land market is the extreme fragmentation of land in this region. Although we have no data on individual plot size, the small median values of clusters of land owned by residents in all villages (1.3 hectares) hint at fragmented landownership. Also, the remarkable geographical distribution of landownership over different villages strongly suggests that land was in high demand. Many households owned land outside their village of residence. In Hondshoote, for example, more than 30% of all taxed villagers owned land outside their place of residence, mostly in the neighbouring villages of Killem and Leisele. In Socx, however, this percentage rose to almost half of the taxpayers. In a few cases

¹⁴ Soens, Thoen, "The Origins of Leasehold," 35-6; Vervaeet, "Goederenbeheer in een veranderende samenleving," 253-7.

the property was dispersed over five or even six different villages (Figure 2 and Table 3).

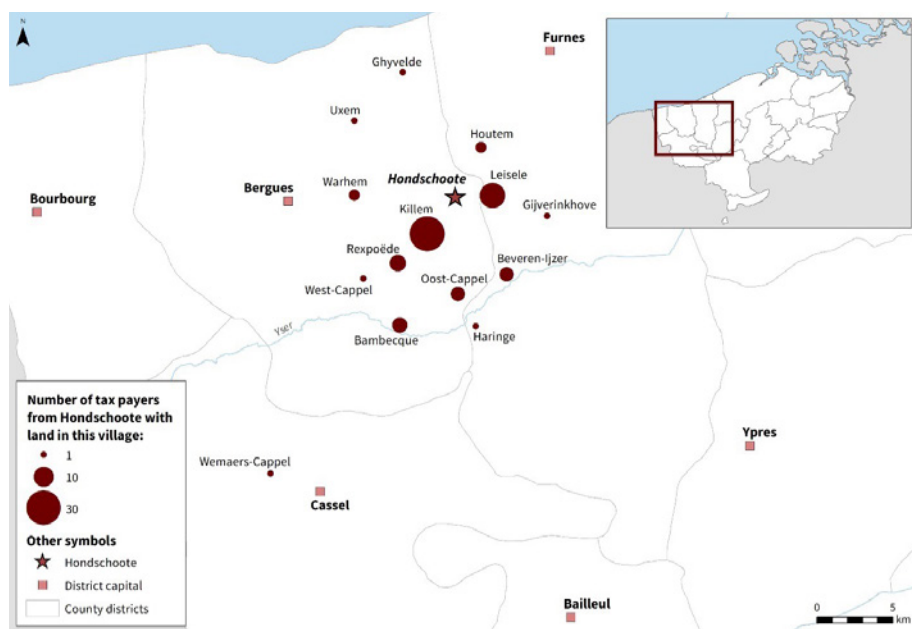


Figure 2. *Spatial dispersion of the land owned by taxpayers from Hondschoote*
Sources: see Figure 1.

Table 3. *Quantitative analysis of the spatial distribution of the land owned by the taxpayers of the Bergues district in 1304*

Village	Number of villages where taxpayers owned land (excluding village of residence)					N	Total N	% of tax payers	Surface area of land owned outside village of residence (ha.)	Total surface area (ha.)	% of taxable surface area
	1	2	3	4	5						
Armboutskappel	4	2				6	35	17,1%	10,8	188,2	5,7%
Bambeke	16	1	1			18	69	26,1%	21,0	159,0	13,2%
Bieren	43	17	1	1		62	139	44,6%	100,4	455,1	22,1%
Herzele	9	4				13	117	11,1%	38,2	536,6	7,1%
Hondschoote	48	12	3			63	205	30,7%	69,9	525,4	13,3%
Killem	31	4	3			38	82	46,3%	72,5	324,2	22,4%
Krochte	21	3	3			27	82	32,9%	39,4	260,5	15,1%
Kwaadepers	17	6	1			24	119	20,2%	50,8	397,6	12,8%
Socx	32	21	10		1	64	134	47,8%	152,9	518,0	29,5%
Stene	38	8		1		47	151	31,1%	99,3	557,8	17,8%

Uksem	2					2	39	5,1%	2,0	88,5	2,2%
Wormhout	22	3	1	2		28	81	34,6%	52,7	306,8	17,2%
Total	283	81	23	4	1	392	1.253	31,3%	709,9	4.317,7	16,4%

Sources: see Figure 1.

In addition to the lease market, households also ensured their survival through the cultivation of industrial crops. The cultivation of madder for the urban textile industry, for example, was widespread in Coastal Flanders during the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century. The presence of fodder crops on many holdings also indicates that cattle were present.¹⁵ Finally, to boost their income, households in this region also resorted to textile production. For the villages in the district of Bergues, evidence of rural textile production dates back to the 1270s.¹⁶ Another compensatory strategy was off-farm employment. In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the Flemish water boards (the institutions that were responsible for the maintenance of sea walls, drains, ditches and sluices in the coastal plain) offered such employment to large numbers of locally hired labourers whose wages were substantially lower than comparable wages paid in other parts of Flanders.¹⁷ Although the available sources do not allow us to sketch a complete picture of the economic activities of the peasantries in this part of Flanders, the picture that emerges from the fiscal sources c. 1300 indicates that the majority of the households in this region must have depended on the market for their subsistence and therefore highly exposed to risk when markets were disturbed. The structural vulnerabilities of these populations explain why the Low Countries – the coastal areas in particular – were so heavily affected by the disastrous harvest failure of 1315.

2. Harvest failure and famine (1315-6)

As is well-known, the first harvest failure of 1315 was the result of excessive precipitation. The adverse weather conditions in 1315 resulted in heavy rainfall and flooding. One of the most insightful sources on the adverse weather conditions is a register of confiscations drawn up between July and December 1315 in the context of the Franco-Flemish War of 1314-6.¹⁸ In order to eliminate political opposition within Flanders, Count Robert of Béthune (1305-22) ordered the confiscation of all goods belonging to partisans of the French king. Covering the entire harvesting season, the document contains numerous references to incessant rains, storms, large-scale inundations, rivers bursting their banks, and inaccessible roads (*le lait tans, le lait et mauvais*

¹⁵ Thoen, "Technique agricole," 51-68.

¹⁶ Coornaert, *La draperie-sayetterie d'Hondschoote*, 3-4.

¹⁷ Soens, "Floods and Money," 341-2.

¹⁸ Lille, Archives départementales du Nord (ADN), B6949.

tans, les pleuresses, les grans eauwes, damaige de tempieste, damaige [...] delle pleue etc.).¹⁹ In Wattendam, for example, the portage along the Aa river was reportedly on the verge of collapse due to the great current, urging the ‘poor locals’ to beg the comital officials for help.²⁰

As a consequence of the extreme weather conditions, fields and crops were lost, especially in low-lying areas such as Coastal Flanders and the Scheldt valley. Comital officials responsible for the confiscation of goods in the Bourbourg and Cassel districts, for instance, frequently refer to ‘wasted’ and inundated crops and fields (*9 mesures de bleit ki estoit en l'iauwe, 3 mesures de bleit [...] don't li plus grant partie fu wasteie, 2 mesures d'orge [...] dont il y eut grant partie wasteit, li remanans à prendre en l'iauwe, le remanant gyssant en l'iauwe, li sourplus de ses warisons gist en l'iauwe et perist etc.*).²¹ In Vieux-Berquin, officials reported 500 sheaves of wheat “floating in the water” that were nonetheless sold (*500 garbes de bleit vendues ki flotoient en l'iauwe*).²² In other places as well, rotting straw and germinating sheaves of grain were put on the market.²³ To save what was left, labourers started harvesting at night²⁴ and began threshing immediately after the harvest, a task that was usually carried out during the calmer winter months.²⁵ In the village of Mater (Oudenaarde district), in the Scheldt valley, comital officials justified their high costs by the fact that the harvester wanted to be paid in hard cash (rather than in kind) and that the threshers “costed more than if they had carried out [the work] in the winter” (*pour le damaige ke li bateur couerent plus ke il n'en euysent fait en yver*).²⁶ The torrential rains of spring and summer of 1315 also had a devastating impact on livestock. In Millam (Bourbourg district) 46 sheep were reportedly rescued from the river but six died nonetheless.²⁷ In Thiennes (Cassel district) another 28 sheep died of *claviel* (sheeppox), an outbreak presumably induced by reduced resistance and poor hygienic circumstances due to the persistent rainfall.²⁸

Although it is difficult to quantify the approximate extent of crop failure, Geens calculated that in the summer of 1315 approximately one fourth of the cultivated area in the Bourbourg district was destroyed by the torrential rains.²⁹ However, the amount of land under cultivation does not necessarily provide a direct measure of the agricultural output. Instead, indications for production levels can be reconstructed from the deflated receipts from tithes collected by

¹⁹ ADN, B6949, ff. 29v, 51v, 52r, 62v, 66v, 67r-v, 97v, 98r etc.

²⁰ ADN, B6949, f. 12r.

²¹ ADN, B6949, ff. 9r-v, 10r, 11r, 29v, 30r.

²² ADN, B6949, f. 30r.

²³ ADN, B6949, ff. 30r, 42r, 51r, 67r.

²⁴ ADN, B6949, ff. 9r-v.

²⁵ ADN, B6949, ff. 29r-v, 31r, 39v, 66v, 71r, 73v.

²⁶ ADN, B6949, f. 67r.

²⁷ ADN, B6949, f. 10v.

²⁸ ADN, B6949, f. 28v.

²⁹ Geens, “The Great Famine,” 1059.

Saint John's hospital (Bruges) in Houtave and Koudekerke (Heist), both located in the coastal plain north of the city (Figure 3 and Table 4).³⁰ The results are striking: in both villages, the receipts of 1315, expressed in liters of wheat, are roughly between 70 and 80 percent below average (more precisely: the 'great' and 'small' tithes of Houtave stood at 76 and 75% below average, respectively, whereas the tithes of Koudekerke were 72% below average). To compare: based on manorial accounts the 'national' composite gross crop yields in England stood at about 25% below average in 1315, and around 36% below average based on a collection of tithe receipts.³¹ Unfortunately, the hospital accounts of 1316 and 1318 are missing, but it appears that production recovered relatively quickly: although in 1317 tithe receipts were still roughly 10 to 20% below average, by 1319 and 1320 the receipts were again well above average.

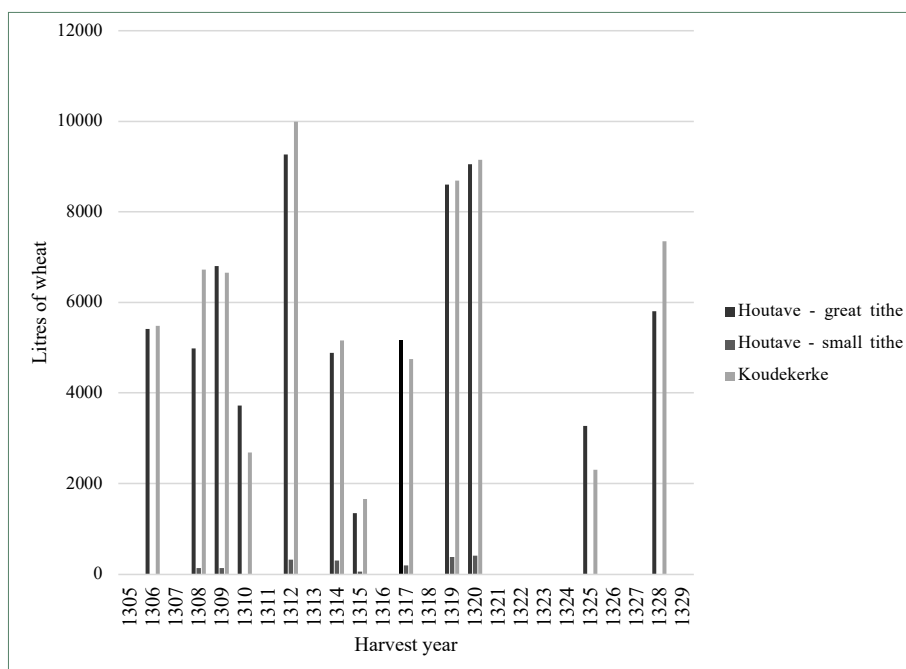


Figure 3. *Deflated receipts from tithes collected by Saint John's hospital (Bruges) in Houtave and Koudekerke (Heist) expressed in litres of wheat*

Source: CAB, OCMW-archief, Sint-Janshospitaal, Rekeningen 1306-28.

³⁰ City Archives of Bruges (CAB), OCMW-archief, Sint-Janshospitaal, Rekeningen 1310-20. For the deflation we used wheat prices for Bruges mentioned in Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De Rekeningen van de stad*, t. 2, 1197-9 (for the year 1310) and Soens, "Waterbeheer in een veranderende samenleving," 564-5 for the years 1312, 1314 and 1317, and the wheat prices mentioned in accounts of St John's hospital of 1319 and 1320. Note that the receipts from the tithes were recorded in *goeder paie*. To convert these sums to *grooten tournois* we used Soens, *De spade in de dijk?*, XVIII.

³¹ Slavin, *Experiencing Famine*, 44-59.

Table 4. *Deflated receipts of tithes collected by Saint John's hospital (Bruges) in Houtave and Koudekerk expressed in litres of wheat (1306-28)*

Harvest year	Houtave – 'great tithe'		Houtave – 'small tithe'		Koudekerke	
	litres of wheat	% of mean	litres of wheat	% of mean	litres of wheat	% of mean
1306	5.415,62	95			5.483,55	93
1308	4.987,83	88	137,28	56	6.726,70	114
1309	6.804,75	119	135,79	56	6.653,68	113
1310	3.722,83	65			2.688,71	46
1312	9.268,07	163	326,34	134	9.990,37	170
1314	4.890,53	86	301,00	124	5.160,00	88
1315	1.348,56	24	61,01	25	1.661,61	28
1317	5.161,29	91	193,55	79	4.748,39	81
1319	8.602,15	151	387,10	159	8.688,17	148
1320	9.054,90	159	407,47	167	9.145,44	155
1325	3.278,94	58			2.307,40	39
1328	5.806,45	102			7.354,84	125
Mean	5.695,16	100	243,69	100	5.884,07	100

Source: see Figure 3.

The sample, of course, is small and the relationship between tithe collections and arable production volumes is neither simple nor linear. During the dire years 1315-7 we might expect resistance from producers to pay their dues. Also, grain prices in Flanders do not perfectly reflect levels of domestic arable production. Because Flanders, like other densely populated and heavily urbanized regions in Europe, relied on import from neighbouring regions – northern France in particular – grain prices were also influenced by import volumes.³² Since imports were hampered as a result of the Franco-Flemish wars (see below), the level of grain prices in Flanders probably does not accurately reflect the decrease in domestic production. Despite these caveats, however, there is little doubt that the trends of the deflated tithe receipts of Houtave and Koudekerke can be taken as evidence of a strong and calamitous decline in yields.

As a result of the harvest failure, prices quickly reached unprecedented heights. Contemporary administrative documents and later chronicles unequivocally refer to the famine years as “the expensive times” (*die diere tijt*,

³² Note that Lombardy, like Flanders, was also heavily dependent on long-distance food imports, exposing cities like Genova and Parma to severe food insecurity whenever political or military events hindered trade flows, see Albini, “Carestie in area lombarda,” 171-207.

le chier tans).³³ This was not without cause. In 1316 the price of rye was eight times higher compared to 1312 (Figure 4). This spectacular rise in prices during the famine year 1316 was not only the result of a drop in domestic production, but was also influenced by the political and military conflict with France. This conflict, and the subsequent export restrictions enacted by the French king, exacerbated the shortage of food and drove up food prices. As a result of the hostilities with Flanders, the king ordered a ban on export of foodstuffs to Flanders. In northern France, trade activities with Flanders came to a grinding halt during the famine years.³⁴ The French king also succeeded in isolating Flanders. Export of food to Flanders via the Duchy of Brabant or through Brabantine trade networks was prohibited in February 1315.³⁵ Cities in Brabant, such as Mechelen, also increased their policing efforts to ensure that no grain was exported to Flanders.³⁶ Import of grain through other border regions of Flanders also dried up. The political alliance of France with the count of Holland, Hainaut and Zeeland ensured that no grain was exported from these regions to Flanders. The latter regions, however, were granted permission to buy grain and other victuals in northern France as early as October 1314.³⁷

In other words, the French king strategically and successfully managed to isolate Flanders from grain import over land from neighbouring principalities. The only way Flanders could import grain was via the North Sea. However, the import of grain from Southern Europe or other grain exporting regions was also deliberately sabotaged by the French king. From the city of Calais, the French king had ordered his naval admiral to intercept ships loaded with victuals heading to Flanders.³⁸

As a result of the strategic actions initiated and lead by the French kings, the county of Flanders experienced formidable challenges in obtaining sufficient food from abroad. The deliberate ‘starvation strategy’ of the French king should be taken into account to explain the unprecedented inflation of food prices in 1316. The hunger strategy of the France also proved successful. Despite state-sponsored attempts to hijack food transports at sea,³⁹ Flanders agreed to resume peace talks with France in the early fall of 1316 and, subsequently, grain could be imported again from northern France. As a direct result, mortality dropped in the cities of Bruges and Ypres.⁴⁰ In 1317, prices

³³ See e.g. CAB, *OCMW-archief*, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van de Potterie, reg. 18, f. 8 and Magdaleprozerie, Charters, 422; Ghent University Library, ms. 3289 (*Memorieboek der stad Gent, 1301-1568*), f. 9r; Meeus, “De ‘Rymkronyk van Vlaenderen,’” 45; Des Marex, De Sagher, *Comptes de la ville d’Ypres*, vol. 2, 34. These examples could be multiplied.

³⁴ Derville, *L’agriculture du Nord*, 87-8.

³⁵ de Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 619-20.

³⁶ Peeters, “Het financieel-economisch profiel,” 106-7.

³⁷ Sneller, Unger, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis*, 5-6.

³⁸ Arnoux, “Famines, blés marocains,” Heebøll-Holm, *Ports, Piracy, and Maritime War*, 36 and 42.

³⁹ Speecke, “Isti ponerentur in officio scabinatus,” 31, footnote 8.

⁴⁰ Van Werveke, “La famine de l’an 1316,” 8-9.

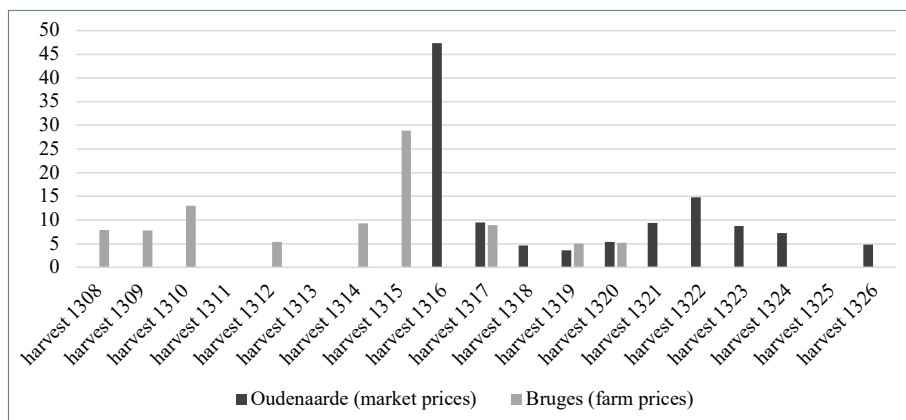


Figure 4. Price of rye in Oudenaarde and Bruges (*d. groten/100 litres*) (1308-26)

Sources: for Bruges: Schoutteten, "Het Sint-Janshospitaal," appendix 15; for Oudenaarde: see City Archives Oudenaarde (CAO), *Archives OLV Hospital*, 149bis.

normalized again (Figure 4). The precarious position of Flemish consumers during the famine years 1315 and 1316 is not only reflected in the price levels, but also in the volatility of food prices during these years. In the city accounts of Ypres, there are clear indications that the food supply was severely interrupted resulting in high price volatility. Between November 1315 and November 1316 bread weights were adjusted no less than forty-nine times by the city official. This meant that, on average, bread prices in Ypres changed every seven to eight days.⁴¹

However, just when grain prices were returning to pre-famine levels, the Low Countries were struck hard by another disaster that wreaked havoc in large parts of northern Europe. Based on over 3,000 manorial accounts Philip Slavin was able to calculate that, between 1319 and 1320, England and Wales lost about 62% of their bovine population, which caused a drastic fall in manure resources and animal traction, but also resulted in a significant decline in dairy production.⁴² Although such detailed quantitative records are lacking for the County of Flanders, a similar mortality rate is not unlikely. One of the rare sources that gives us a glimpse of the impact of the cattle plague is a financial report of the governors of the leprosarium of Bruges presented to the aldermen of the city sometime in late 1318 or 1319. In this report the governors stated that "during the [years of the] cattle mortality sixty-one breeders died in our farm in Houtave and in our Bruges' farm nine cows died during the first year [i.e. 1317], and in the following year [1318] another seven

⁴¹ Des Marez, De Sagher, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres*, vol. 1, 600.

⁴² Slavin, "The Great Bovine Pestilence," 1242.

out of eight newly purchased cows died [as well]”.⁴³ The massive loss of cattle was especially problematic in Coastal Flanders since this was a cattle breeding region. While we know that the cattle herds of the large estates owned by Saint John’s hospital had largely recovered by 1333 (Table 5), peasants would probably have had much more difficulty getting their livestock back to pre-pestilence levels due to the lack of capital. As we will explore in the next section, capital resources of peasantries were probably severely impacted as a result of the famine years 1315 and 1316.

Table 5. *Cattle held at the estates of Saint John’s hospital of Bruges (1310-33)*

Estate	1310	1313	1315	1333
<i>Altena</i>				25
<i>Briele</i>	38	35	27	34
<i>Donk</i>	38	34	36	28
<i>Moere</i>	62	62	57	
<i>Oedelem</i>	16	16	15	22
<i>Oostkamp</i>	30	33	31	
<i>Zuierenkerke (Scueringhe)</i>	104	96	101	99
<i>Snellegem</i>	18	21	19	22
<i>Trente</i>	22	24	20	29
<i>Wenduine</i>	11	16	19	
<i>Westscure</i>	43	44	36	
Total	382	381	361	259

Source: Mertens, “Enkele grote Vlaamse hoeven,” 45-60.

3. *The socially differentiated impact of the famine*

The spectacular rise in grain prices in 1315 and 1316 had a profound effect on both the urban and rural populations in Flanders. Already in the summer of 1315, rural populations resorted to desperate measures to secure their food supply. The abovementioned confiscation records of 1315, for instance, mention the plunder of 10 ‘measures’ of wheat, oats and beans by *chiaus de Saint Pierebruech*, indicating that a substantial number of villagers of Saint-Pierre-Brouck (Bourbourg district) participated in the forceful appropriation of these crops.⁴⁴ In Armbouts-Cappel (Bergues district) 170 ‘measures’ of land were equally described as plundered by the commoners (*wasteies dou*

⁴³ *Item in die steerfte van den beesten so storven upt hof te Houtawe LXI hooft quekenoods ende upt hof te Brucghe so storven binnen upt eerste jaer IX coen ende upt ander jaer so storver VII coen van den VIII coen diere weder ghecocht waren* (CAB, OCMW-archief, Magdalenaleprozerie, Oorkonden, 422). For an analysis and dating of the report, see: Maréchal, “Het hospitaalwezen,” 1415-9.

⁴⁴ ADN, B6949, f. 3v.

commun).⁴⁵ In the lordship of Rode (Kachtem), in the district of Ypres, so-called “skimmers” (*li escumeur*) forcefully entered a granary and took 550 of the 1.900 sheaves of oats stored there.⁴⁶ In the parishes of Velzeke and Denderwindeke (district of Alost), too, the comital officers report damage to the fields inflicted by looters.⁴⁷ In other areas, grain stocks had to be guarded by armed men (*par forche*), as was the case for the confiscated wheat of lord Walter of Gistel in the Belle and Warneton districts.⁴⁸

Although comprehensive documentation for the following months is largely lacking, it appears that commoners had become increasingly inventive in coping with food shortages. In May 1316 Count Robert of Béthune ordered his bailiffs and court officers in Flanders to arrest and publicly punish all persons who went to abbeys for sustenance under the false pretext of belonging to the count's household.⁴⁹

The theft of crops on the fields and grain stored in barns by large groups of rural dwellers in Coastal Flanders underscores the severity of food insecurity following the 1315 harvest failure. This is unsurprising in light of the patterns of landownership that we reconstructed for this region, which reveal inherent vulnerabilities and exposure to food shortages for the majority of rural households. We can illustrate this by analyzing the value of land owned by peasantries in relation to food prices during these years. In Table 6 we converted the land owned by peasants in Coastal Flanders into capital (using 1312-3 land prices from the Ypres region) and calculated how much rye could be purchased with the total capital value of the land owned by individual households.⁵⁰

For example, in 1312, the capital value of the median landowner (Q2) was equivalent to 26.537,82 liters of rye. Based on a daily consumption of 0,9 liters of rye per person and a household size of four, the capital value of the median peasant landowner enabled him to feed his family for 7.371,62 days. For the lowest quartile (Q1) the capital value of the land owned was equivalent to 11,794.5 liters of rye, sufficient to feed a family of four for 3.276,27 days. However, using 1316 rye prices, a starkly different picture emerges, particularly for Q1 households. In 1316, the capital value of their land had dropped to a rye equivalent of 1.350,29 liters. This quantity would have sufficed to feed an average household during approximately one year (375,25 days). Beyond that, hunger was inevitable.

In reality, the material and economic situation of households at the bottom of the property ladder was likely worse than these calculations suggest.

⁴⁵ ADN, B6949, f. 16r.

⁴⁶ ADN, B6949, f. 40r.

⁴⁷ ADN, B6949, f. 67r.

⁴⁸ ADN, B6949, ff. 39v, 40r, 51v, 57r, 58r.

⁴⁹ Vleeschouwers, *De oorkonden*, 705, no. 638.

⁵⁰ The land price in the region of Ypres in 1312-3 was 16 pounds *parisis* per ‘measure’ or 727,27 *groten*/hectare, see Des Marez, De Sagher, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres*, vol. 1, 444-7. For the daily grain consumption, see Vandenbroeke, *Sociale geschiedenis*, 237.

After all, land prices probably fell between 1312 and 1316 as rural households sold their properties to ensure their survival. Furthermore, this reconstruction does not account for other expenses, such as housing, heating, clothing, and other essential foodstuffs. Therefore, it is fair to assume that these calculations overestimate the real exchange value of land during this period.

Table 6. *Capital reserve of the rural population in the Bergues district in 1312 and 1316*

Quartiles	Land owner- ship (ha.)	Capital value (d. <i>groten</i>)	Capital value (litres of rye)		Capital reserve (number of days)	
	1304	1312-3	1312	1316	1312	1316
Min.	0,04	26,63	491,44	56,29	136,51	15,64
Q1	0,88	639,15	11.794,58	1.350,89	3.276,27	375,25
Q2	1,98	1.438,08	26.537,82	3.039,51	7.371,62	844,31
Q3	4,13	2.996,01	55.287,12	6.332,32	15.357,53	1.759,02
Max.	132,12	95.872,28	1.769.187,74	202.634,12	491.441,04	56.287,26

Note: The capital reserve is calculated for a household of four, based on a land price of 16 l. par. per 'measure' (= 727,27 *groten*/ha.) and a daily consumption of 0,9 litres of grain per person. *Sources:* Des Marez, *De Sagher, Comptes de la ville d'Ypres*, vol. 1, 444-7; Vandenbroeke, *Sociale geschiedenis*, 237.

Although imperfect, these calculations are instructive as they demonstrate that the high food prices in 1315 and 1316 effectively drained the capital stored in land. The exchange value of land, measured in rye equivalents, dropped precipitously in 1316 compared to preceding years. This was especially dire news for those dependent on the market for their survival. Consumers in the cities too evidently struggled to make ends meet. In Bruges, the total sum of land rent arrears owed to the city increased tenfold between the financial years 1315-6 and 1316-7. Likewise, the number of defaulters rose sharply from five in 1315-6 to sixty-nine the following year (Figure 5).⁵¹

These data reflect not only financial stress but are also indicative of the mortality crisis that struck Bruges. As mentioned earlier, more than 1.800 bodies were collected and buried at city expense in 1316. Municipal legislation enacted during these years also hints at financial distress and crisis mortality. In October 1316, Bruges authorities issued new inheritance laws addressing situations where both husband and wife had died. The ordinance also included provisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of debts by heirs.⁵²

In Ypres, the city government took advantage of widespread urban rent defaults to conduct a sanitation operation in Upstal, a proletarian suburb. In this part of the city, the inhabitants were reportedly "so impoverished – and many had died of poverty – that neither they nor their heirs could uphold the

⁵¹ Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De Rekeningen van de stad*, t. 2, 1267, 1338, 1401, 1474, 1509-11, 1586-7.

⁵² Gilliodts Van Severen, *Coutumes des pays*, vol. 1, 336-41.

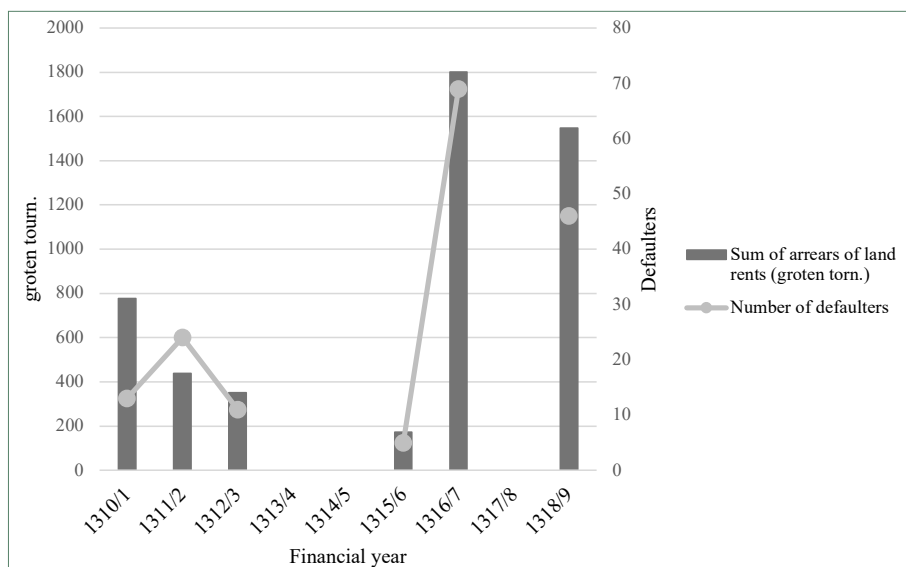


Figure 5. *Evolution of arrears of urban land rents and the number of defaulters in the city of Bruges (1310-9)*

Source: Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De Rekeningen van de stad*, t. 2, 1267, 1338, 1401, 1474, 1509-11, 1586-7.

land rents”.⁵³ Municipal governments also used the subsistence crisis to tighten control over urban poverty relief by replacing private charity directly and by assigning a greater role to the parish poor tables that were arguably less selective and reached a wider audience than the poverty relief offered by the urban hospitals. In Douai, in the nearby county of Artois, a *Bourse commune* was reportedly established in 1317.⁵⁴ In Ypres extensive loans were granted to the poor tables of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁵ whereas in Bruges the municipal authorities transferred wheat rents from the Hospital of the Holy Spirit to the parish poor tables to be distributed weekly “for the common good and benefit of the poor”.⁵⁶

The available evidence from Flanders clearly indicates that those who were dependent on the market for access to food struggled during these years, both in urban and rural environments. There is no doubt that during the Great Famine, when the ‘structural poverty’ of those without sufficient land,

⁵³ *Item, rechet des vieses maisons, que on a vendues del Upstal à abatre et autrement, et pour lieuage d'erbe, dont cil qui tinrent l'erbe et les maisons sont si apovri et plusieurs en sont mort par povreté qu'il, ne leur hoir, n'ont pooir de tenir le cense* (Des Marez, De Sagher, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres*, vol. 2, 35).

⁵⁴ Dhérent, “Maladies et mortalités,” 83.

⁵⁵ Des Marez, De Sagher, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres*, vol. 2, 34.

⁵⁶ CAB, OCMW-archief, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van de Potterie, reg. 18, f. 8.

employment or other means of support converged with “episodic or seasonal deprivation” caused by bad harvests and natural disaster, rural and urban populations in this county faced massive impoverishment, physical and mental distress, and ultimately, widespread mortality.⁵⁷ However, not everyone suffered equally during the grain shortages of 1315 and 1316.

Some groups benefited significantly from the high prices and food shortages of these years. Accounts of large landowning institutions, such as hospitals and abbeys, reveal that the famine years resulted in increased revenues. For example, the Cistercian abbey of Ter Doest in Lissewege (near Bruges), which had been plagued by debt since the late thirteenth century forcing the abbey to sell land and to shift from direct demesne farming to leasehold,⁵⁸ reported significant profits in 1315. In contrast to its 1279 deficit of over 228 pounds *parisis*,⁵⁹ the abbey’s estates, which were scattered across the district of Vier Ambachten (Flanders) and Zuid-Beveland (Zealand), achieved a profit exceeding 411 pounds *parisis* in 1315. With the exception of one demesne farm, all holdings exploited by the abbey delivered profit in 1315.⁶⁰

In much the same way the demesne farms of Saint John’s hospital in Bruges even recorded their highest profits ever (Figure 6). Detailed crop and stock inventories for these demesne farms for 1310, 1313, 1315, and 1333 allow for comparisons of net financial profit relative to farm size.⁶¹ Figure 7 shows that in 1315, four out of ten demesne farms achieved net profits exceeding 30 *groten tournois* per ‘measure’ of land, while in the other years under scrutiny net profits rarely surpassed 20 *groten tournois* per ‘measure’. Unsurprisingly, the highest profits per unit of land were obtained in Zuienkerke (Scueringhe), the demesne farm with the largest surface area (551 ‘measures’) and the highest percentage of sown land (74%, nearly half of which was sown with wheat). By contrast, the lowest profits (4 *groten tournois* per ‘measure’) were reported at farms with either the smallest surface area (Snellegem: 65 ‘measures’) or the lowest percentage of sown land (Oostkamp: 45%).

This suggests that large farms producing food surpluses for the market thrived during these crisis years. Scarcity resulting from harvest failures and trade disruptions translated into high profits for large farms. Existing stocks of grains may also have contributed to the financial success of these institutions. For example, in August 1316, the monks of Ter Doest, faced significant criticism for exploiting the crisis by selling food stocks, originally intended

⁵⁷ For the distinction between ‘structural poverty’, ‘life-cycle poverty’, and ‘episodic’ or ‘seasonal deprivation’, see Dyer, “Did the rich really help the poor in medieval England?” 307.

⁵⁸ Dekker, Kruisheer, “Een rekening,” 282-7.

⁵⁹ Public Library of Bruges, ms. 616, f. 1r. The revenues of the *grangiae* were 1.576 l. 12 s. *parisis*, but the expenses amounted to 1.804 l. 18 s. 2 d. *parisis*.

⁶⁰ Dekker, Kruisheer, “Een rekening,” 306.

⁶¹ Mertens, “Enkele grote Vlaamse hoeven,” 45-60. The inventory dated “1300” should be read as “1313”. See Augustijn, Rombaut, Vandermaesen, *Bronnen voor de agrarische geschiedenis*, 55-6 and Schoutteten “Het Sint-Janshospitaal.”

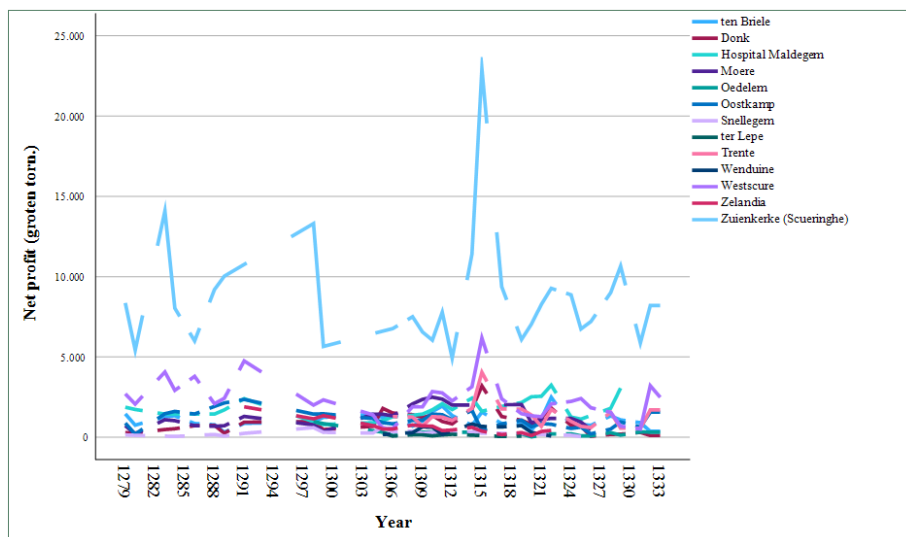


Figure 6. *Profits of the demesne farms of Saint John's hospital (Bruges) between 1279 and 1333*
 Note: profits were recorded in *d. parisis* (1279-1309), *lichter paie* (1310-22) and *goeder paie* (1324-33). To be able to compare we converted them into *grooten tournois* (conversion based on Soens, *De spade in de dijk?*, XVIII).

Source: CAB, OCMW-archief, Sint-Janshospitaal, Rekeningen 1279-1333.

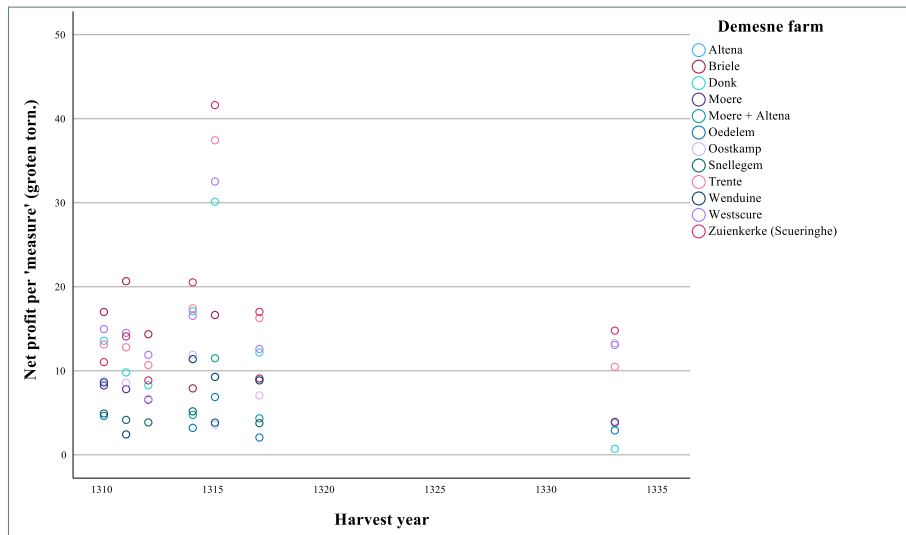


Figure 7. *Net financial profits per 'measure' of the demesne farms of Saint John's hospital (Bruges)*

Source: see Figure 6.

as alms for the poor, on the private market.⁶² In sum, the demesne accounts of Flemish abbeys and hospitals show that the Great Famine also generated 'winners'. In particular, large farms and estates that produced surpluses for the market gained financially from the distress experienced by urban and rural consumers.

The harvest failure of 1315-6 not only provided short-term financial gains for large farm owners but also allowed institutional landowners such as abbeys and hospitals to strengthen their financial positions and expand their properties. Saint John's hospital in Bruges, for example, used the exceptional profits from its estates to pay off debts that had burdened its treasury.⁶³ Simultaneously, the hospital invested in acquiring annuities and immovable property, converting profits from its demesne farms directly into capital assets. Between 1315 and 1320 the hospital accounts recorded the acquisition of multiple plots of land in Wenduine, Zuierkerke, Sint-Andries, Maldegem, Oedelem, and Zeeland to expand its demesne farms.⁶⁴

In 1316 the leprosarium of Bruges also purchased more than 110 'measures' (44 hectares) of land to establish a new demesne farm in Loppem – probably the single largest land acquisition by the institution since its founding before 1227.⁶⁵ Similarly, the hospital of Oudenaarde, a town located along the Scheldt River in Interior Flanders, acquired small plots of land between 1315 and 1318. These acquisitions were strategic, as they were concentrated in villages where the hospital already owned significant immovable assets. The accounts of later years (1319 to 1327) show no further active land acquisitions.⁶⁶

Although solid evidence only exists for rural land purchases by urban institutions, indications suggest that wealthy urban residents also sought to extend their rural estates during the famine years. Indirect evidence of this comes from a conflict between the city of Furnes and its rural district in 1316 and, again, in 1319 over extraterritorial jurisdiction. A recurring issue in these disputes was the tax exemption claimed by the burghers of Furnes for their rural estates (*que cil de nostre dite ville maintenoient aussi que cil de dehors ne pooient tailler leur bourgeois de biens que il eussent gisant audit terroir*).⁶⁷ As these tax-exempt estates expanded, the taxable land area decreased, increasing the fiscal burden on the remaining peasantries.

In the neighbouring rural district of Bruges, tensions and conflicts with the city of Bruges over taxation, 'outburghership', and rural handicraft production also emerged and were settled in the so-called *Seventeen Points of*

⁶² Archives Grootseminarie Bruges, *Ter Duinen*, Oorkonden, nr. 1582.

⁶³ Debts fell from 6,385 l. 14 s. 3 d. in 1314-5 to 1,353 l. 6 s. 6 d. in 1319-20, see: CAB, *OCMW-archief*, Sint-Janshospitaal, Rekeningen 1314-5, Schulden, s.f. and Rekeningen 1319-20, Schulden, s.f.

⁶⁴ CAB, *OCMW-archief*, Sint-Janshospitaal, Rekeningen 1315-6/1320-1, Uitgaven. In 1319-20 the hospital even built a new 'guesthouse' in Zuierkerke (Rekening 1319-20)

⁶⁵ Maréchal, "Het hospitaalwezen," 1418.

⁶⁶ CAO, *Archives OLV Hospital*, 149bis.

⁶⁷ Gilliodts Van Severen, *Coutumes des pays*, vol. 3, 74-8.

Agreement issued in February 1318.⁶⁸ The tensions between cities and their rural hinterlands in Coastal Flanders, as exemplified by the conflicts mentioned above, are quite possibly connected to the extension of urban capital into the countryside during and shortly after the Great Famine. More research is required, but the agreements between Furnes and Bruges with their rural hinterlands suggest that urban centers expanded their reach into the countryside during this period.⁶⁹

4. *Conclusion*

The County of Flanders holds a central place in the historiography of the Great Famine. Notably, the detailed accounts of corpses collected by the city governments of Bruges and Ypres in 1316 have attracted scholarly attention. The thousands of corpses buried at the expense of these cities serve as hard quantitative evidence of the excess mortality recorded during the famine years. However, the particularities of the Flemish experience extend beyond the well-documented demographic effects.

This chapter has shown that the rural populations of Flanders – particularly in coastal regions – were structurally vulnerable to shocks. Population growth had fragmented landownership, and fiscal data from 1304 reveal that approximately 80% of resident landowning households possessed less than 5 hectares. When excessive rainfall resulted in a sharp decrease in yields, rural populations in Coastal Flanders clearly panicked, as evidenced by the numerous references to crop theft and barn pillaging. The effects of the harvest shortfalls of 1315 and 1316 were exacerbated by the Franco-Flemish conflict. As we have shown, the French king successfully managed to halt export of grain to Flanders from its neighbouring regions. Famine in Flanders was not only the result of domestic harvest failure, but also of the successful economic isolation strategy adopted by France.

The last section of our chapter has argued that the famine not only produced victims but also generated winners. Whereas net consumers faced dire times in 1315 and 1316, net producers of grain profited from food scarcity and high prices. The farming profits generated during the crisis accrued largely to urban landowners, both lay and ecclesiastical. These profits enabled those urban actors to acquire additional land in the countryside. Although our evidence is indirect and more research is required, the period of the Great Famine was likely characterized by a net transfer of land from rural to urban populations in Coastal Flanders. Also, the redistribution of political power and fiscal autonomy in favour of the cities in Coastal Flanders suggests that rural districts and their populations were weakened as a result of the Great Famine.

⁶⁸ Gilliodts Van Severen, vol. 1, 379-92.

⁶⁹ On urban bias in this region see also Lambrecht, “*Si grant inégalité?*,” 153-67.

Despite these hardships, rural communities were not defeated. Confronted with high food prices and unequal fiscal pressures in the early 1320s, the peasantry of Coastal Flanders took up arms against the count of Flanders and the socio-economic elites governing this region. While speculative, it is possible that the willingness of entire villages to rebel against fiscal and economic injustices was fueled by the collective memory of deprivation, scarcity, and poverty during the famine and its aftermath.

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Carestie e disuguaglianze. Roma nella crisi economica basso medievale

di Luciano Palermo

Nel periodo storico compreso tra i decenni finali del Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento la carestia è stata una delle forme basilari della disuguaglianza; nei sistemi economici di quelle epoche, infatti, largamente caratterizzati dalla presenza del mercato e della circolazione monetaria, la sua apparizione, nel significato suo proprio di crescita dei prezzi dei beni dell'alimentazione umana, e soprattutto di quelli del grano, impediva l'accesso al mercato a tutti coloro che non disponevano di un reddito sufficiente o di un altro qualsiasi diritto al nutrimento. Ma la crescita dei prezzi dei prodotti agricoli era anche il segnale del sopraggiungere di una fase di crisi economica, capace di creare forti disuguaglianze e gravissimi conflitti sociali, per controllare i quali le autorità politiche fecero ricorso a speciali uffici incaricati di controllare la sicurezza e la continuità dell'avvio dei rifornimenti alimentari verso i mercati urbani. Il saggio esamina come tutti questi passaggi economici e politici si vennero realizzando in quelle epoche nella città di Roma e nel distretto territoriale dal quale essa importava i necessari beni agricoli.

In the historical period between the last decades of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century, famine was one of the basic forms of inequality; in the economic systems of those times, which were largely characterized by the presence of the market and the circulation of money, its appearance, in its true sense of an increase in the prices of human food, and in particular those of cereals, prevented access to the market for all those who did not have sufficient income or any other right to food. At the same time, the increase in the price of agricultural products was also a sign of an economic crisis. All of this gave rise to great inequalities and very serious social conflicts, which the political authorities sought to control by means of special offices responsible for monitoring the continuity of food supplies to urban markets. The essay examines how all these economic and political changes took place in the city of Rome and in the territory from which the necessary agricultural products were imported.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Roma, carestia, crisi economica, disuguaglianza.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Rome, famine, economic crisis, inequality.

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1. *La carestia come forma della disuguaglianza*

Nell'introduzione a un loro volume dedicato alle relazioni che sussistono tra il fenomeno della carestia e le forme dell'intervento pubblico, Jean Drèze e Amartya Sen si soffermano sui rapporti che sono intercorsi, nel corso del tempo, tra l'insorgere delle fasi critiche dell'alimentazione umana e le varie forme storiche della disuguaglianza economica e sociale; e dalle loro argomentazioni questi rapporti emergono talmente stretti che gli eventi storici che noi genericamente chiamiamo carestie vengono da essi direttamente definiti come "disuguaglianze nella distribuzione del cibo".¹ I due studiosi arrivano a questa definizione osservando l'inevitabile presenza di varie forme di disuguaglianza nella genesi storica di questi terribili eventi, e di conseguenza affermano, e questo ci riguarda in questa sede ancora più da vicino, che le indagini sulla disuguaglianza sono sempre fondamentali nelle analisi storiche dedicate allo studio delle carestie. Emerge, dunque, complessivamente dai loro ragionamenti il dato essenziale che la carestia è in sé una forma storica della disuguaglianza, e si potrebbe aggiungere che si tratta di una delle sue principali forme in quanto essa rende disuguale un dato basilare per la stessa sopravvivenza degli esseri umani, e cioè l'accesso al cibo. E da questo insieme di ragionamenti i due studiosi deducono una definizione molto equilibrata di questi gravissimi fenomeni, nella quale la questione della disuguaglianza emerge ancora una volta con evidenza: "La carestia è, per sua natura, un fenomeno sociale (implica l'incapacità di grandi gruppi di persone di stabilire un controllo sul cibo nella società in cui vivono), ma le forze che influenzano tali eventi possono includere, tra l'altro, sviluppi della natura fisica (come il clima e le condizioni atmosferiche) oltre ai processi sociali".²

Ma nel loro volume, come si deduce anche da questa definizione, Jean Drèze e Amartya Sen entrano in un'altra problematica ugualmente collegata al tema della disuguaglianza, e cioè nella questione della cosiddetta 'naturalità' della carestia. L'ipotesi che la carestia possa insorgere come risultato di un disastro esclusivamente naturale è ritenuta sostanzialmente poco plausibile dai due autori; anche in presenza di un evento naturale distruttivo, e il riferimento è soprattutto ai fenomeni climatici avversi, l'apparizione e il livello della gravità della carestia dipendono, infatti, in ultima analisi dalla capacità dei sistemi economici, demografici e sociali di affrontare difficoltà alle quali vanno incontro, difficoltà peraltro ben conosciute e in genere prevedibili. E

¹ *Hunger is not a new affliction. Recurrent famines as well as endemic undernourishment have been persistent features of history [...] Inequalities in the distribution of food are not a new phenomenon. The issue of inequality in the genesis of hunger and famines is not in itself new. The general issue of inequality has always been important in famine analysis* (Drèze, Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, 3-4).

² *Famine is, by its very nature, a social phenomenon (it involves the inability of large groups of people to establish command over food in the society in which they live), but the forces influencing such occurrences may well include, inter alia, developments in physical nature (such as climate and weather) in addition to social processes* (Drèze, Sen, 46).

su questa stessa tematica sono intervenuti con grande acutezza anche Guido Alfani e Cormac Ó Gráda, osservando, a loro volta, in modo altrettanto equilibrato, che sebbene molte carestie possano essere innescate da una produzione inadeguata di cibo, gli esiti finali non sono mai il puro risultato di processi 'naturali', ma sono sempre mediati dell'uomo e delle istituzioni, che con le loro iniziative possono renderle più o meno disastrosi.³ E anche questo approccio ci aiuta a comprendere lo stretto rapporto che sussiste tra l'apparizione di questi fenomeni e le forme della disuguaglianza, se non altro perché le analisi storiche attorno alla carestia hanno sempre dimostrato che le catastrofi alimentari non colpiscono mai tutti i membri di una comunità umana allo stesso modo e con gli stessi risultati.

Anche nel periodo storico che qui prendiamo in considerazione, e dunque nella fase critica compresa tra gli ultimi decenni del Duecento e la metà del secolo successivo, la problematica della disuguaglianza e dei suoi rapporti con la carestia emerge in modo assai netto; in un sistema economico, infatti, qual era quello europeo basso medievale, caratterizzato da una ampia diffusione dell'uso della moneta e da una capillare organizzazione del sistema degli scambi, le carestie erano caratterizzate non necessariamente da un *food availability decline*, che tuttavia poteva essere anche presente, ma generalmente da un *failure of exchange entitlement* (per usare ancora la terminologia di Amartya Sen),⁴ e in queste circostanze la disuguaglianza si manifestava in tutta la sua forza poiché la presenza o dall'assenza di un "titolo di accesso allo scambio", e dunque al mercato, diveniva il fattore discriminante tra chi si trovava in una situazione di vera fame e chi invece riusciva a mantenere, anche in momenti assai gravi, un sufficiente livello dei consumi.⁵

Ma se le carestie erano anche in quelle epoche in larga misura il risultato di un disastro economico, anche quando questo fosse stato innescato da una eventuale caduta della produzione agricola, non è difficile supporre che questi fenomeni fossero anche il risultato di complessi meccanismi economici e sociali frutto di disuguaglianze o generatori di esse; dal punto di vista dell'analisi della carestia, e della disuguaglianza di cui essa era espressione o che essa produceva, il problema basilare non è, dunque, quello di osservare come la natura si accanisse contro la fragilità delle strutture produttive umane, ma

³ *Although many famines were in fact triggered by inadequate production, the final outcomes (the actual characteristics of each famine) were never the pure result of 'natural' processes but were always mediated by human agency and by institutions (private and public), which could go a long way towards making specific episodes more or less catastrophic* (Alfani, Ó Gráda, *Famine in European History*, 3-4).

⁴ Cfr. Sen, *Poverty and Famines*.

⁵ Le carestie bassomedievali europee sono state oggetto, negli ultimi decenni, di numerosi e accurati studi, che hanno sostanzialmente capovolto i tradizionali schematismi malthusiani. Per una impostazione generale di questa problematica sia consentito rinviare a Palermo, "Scarsità di risorse;" e sui termini, non solo relativi al Medioevo, di questo dibattito si veda inoltre Newman, *Hunger in History*. Si vedano, inoltre, i saggi e gli apparati bibliografici presenti in Oliva, Benito, *Crisis de subsistencia*; Bourin, Drendel, Menant, *Les disettes*; Benito, *Crisis alimentarias*; Benito, Riera, *Guerra y carestia*; Palermo, Fara, Benito, *Políticas contra el hambre*.

piuttosto quello di comprendere come i sistemi economici e politici si organizzassero per affrontare i momenti critici, anche perché in quella fase storica i gruppi dirigenti sapevano assai bene che la coltivazione dei campi doveva affrontare un ambiente naturale normalmente avverso e ciclicamente assai negativo.

La maggior parte delle cosiddette carestie segnalate nelle fonti che risalgono ai decenni due e trecenteschi qui in esame consistono, come è ben noto, in una crescita ciclica di breve periodo dei prezzi durante alcune fasi delle annate agrarie, e soprattutto a ridosso del nuovo raccolto; e a questa crescita annualmente ricorrente si aggiungevano in quelle epoche i significativi balzi verso l'alto dei prezzi che le fonti registrano periodicamente a una distanza ciclica compresa tra i cinque e i dieci anni. Ma nelle stesse fonti l'apparizione della carestia è altrettanto spesso segnalata come inevitabile conseguenza di manovre economiche o politiche appositamente organizzate e condotte. E infatti, anche se in quelle epoche cominciavano ormai a diffondersi ovunque varie forme di controllo e di divieto dell'esportazione, di fatto i proprietari delle derrate avevano sempre un forte interesse ad esportare i loro beni sui mercati internazionali, piuttosto che di offrirli nei mercati interni, dove i prezzi erano spesso regolamentati e certamente più bassi; e a tutto ciò si aggiungeva l'uso della carestia (e lo vedremo bene nel caso romano qui oltre studiato) come strumento di conquista o di mantenimento della supremazia politica. Diventano in tal modo immediatamente comprensibili le situazioni che la documentazione medievale, sia quella prodotta dai cronisti come anche quella scaturita dagli atti amministrativi, presenta continuamente e cioè il sopraggiungere di gravi carestie pur in presenza di una sostanziale continuità nei livelli della produzione di beni agricoli o, al contrario, l'assenza di gravi carestie anche nel caso di una significativa caduta della produzione. In quanto strumento di lotta politica ed economica, infatti, la carestia poteva apparire anche in assenza di una reale caduta della produzione agricola; e naturalmente poteva anche verificarsi la situazione opposta: anche nel caso di una significativa diminuzione dei raccolti, il tempestivo sopraggiungere dei rifornimenti da altre regioni meno colpite, attratti dalla tensione che immediatamente si riversava sui livelli dei prezzi, impediva generalmente il protrarsi di una fame generalizzata e limitava i danni sociali. Si trattava in entrambi i casi di situazioni generalmente ben note, costantemente ricorrenti, facilmente prevedibili e ciclicamente presenti in tutti i sistemi produttivi agricoli delle epoche qui prese in considerazione, e la diffusa consapevolezza dell'esistenza di questi problemi alimentava ovunque in Europa il dibattito politico, gli scontri sociali e le varie forme della disuguaglianza nell'accesso al cibo, soprattutto per quegli strati della popolazione che per nutrirsi dovevano necessariamente accedere al mercato.

Conseguenza principale di questo approccio analitico alla carestia è la necessità che la conoscenza dei livelli della produzione agricola sia costantemente integrata dall'analisi del funzionamento del mercato e della formazione

dei prezzi che in esso correvano.⁶ Le fonti che ci sono pervenute dal basso medioevo rivelano, infatti, che in quelle epoche queste difficoltà emergevano, ogni anno o ogni certo numero di anni, quando i prezzi dei beni agricoli e dell'alimentazione umana si avviavano ciclicamente a lievitare; e ciò che spingeva in alto i prezzi fino alla carestia non era sempre e necessariamente la carenza in sé della produzione, anche se la debolezza di questa era talvolta il dato di partenza di questi fenomeni, ma la cattiva organizzazione dei rifornimenti che si aggiungeva alle manovre dei produttori locali. E proprio perché il dato della caduta ciclica della produzione agricola era nella cultura economica di quelle epoche un evento assai ben noto, in quasi tutte le città e gli Stati europei di quelle epoche venivano introdotte, a partire dalla metà del XIII secolo, delle specifiche politiche economiche e delle significative innovazioni istituzionali; dappertutto, infatti, le autorità politiche, non potendo far quasi nulla per quanto riguardava i livelli della produzione, decidevano di intervenire sul mercato interno per tenere costanti e possibilmente bassi i prezzi dei cereali e degli altri alimenti e, nello stesso tempo, di regolamentare gli spostamenti commerciali della produzione verso i mercati esterni.⁷

In queste circostanze la disuguaglianza emergeva non solo nelle forme della proprietà dei mezzi di produzione della ricchezza (principalmente la terra e il lavoro agricolo), ma anche e soprattutto nel breve periodo dalle forme di questi processi organizzativi e istituzionali, e più precisamente dalle modalità del funzionamento degli strumenti che le pubbliche autorità utilizzavano per rispondere alla carenza di beni dell'alimentazione: il sistema degli scambi internazionali e l'organizzazione del mercato interno. Appare chiaro, pertanto, che in una situazione di tendenziale crescita dei prezzi, cioè di carestia, il possesso del 'titolo', cioè della capacità di acquisto necessaria per poter accedere al mercato, era decisivo per stabilire quali individui o quali ceti sociali subissero nei termini peggiori la situazione economicamente negativa. Il mercato, quale strumento della creazione del sistema dei prezzi, era, dunque, anche allora il luogo in cui le carestie si manifestavano nelle loro forme più o meno gravi, e ciò accadeva quando l'offerta, non necessariamente la produzione, dei beni dell'alimentazione umana diminuiva e i loro prezzi salivano; ed esso era anche il luogo in cui le disuguaglianze emergevano, perché proprio nel mercato si manifestavano le più significative differenze nella capacità di acquisto dei compratori. Ma, proprio per queste sue funzioni, il mercato poteva anche essere il luogo in cui le carestie e le disuguaglianze potevano essere attenuate o ridimensionate.

⁶ Cfr. Ravallion, *Markets and Famines*.

⁷ Cfr. Palermo, "Politiche contro la carestia."

2. La carestia come forma della crisi economica

Ma la carestia non era la forma solo della disuguaglianza; nei sistemi economici che precedono l'industrializzazione, dunque tra medioevo ed età moderna, essa era anche una forma fondamentale della crisi economica, la cui manifestazione primordiale in quelle epoche era proprio costituita dalla tendenza alla crescita dei prezzi dei beni dell'alimentazione. Già di per sé la caduta della produzione agricola, qualunque ne fosse la causa (il clima, la guerra, la bassa produttività dei terreni marginali messi a coltura), era comunque un segnale economicamente negativo; ma queste difficoltà, proprio per il loro legame indissolubile con il sistema degli scambi, confluivano poi sempre nella funzionalità dei mercati e condizionavano la formazione dei prezzi, i quali a loro volta crescendo abbattevano la capacità di acquisto dei consumatori. Tutto ciò accentuava l'esclusione dei meno abbienti dal mercato e aggravava le forme generali della disuguaglianza nell'accesso al cibo. Dunque, carestia, crisi economica e disuguaglianza erano tre aspetti dello stesso fenomeno economico negativo all'interno di una società che nelle epoche qui prese in esame stava imparando a gestire sempre meglio il mercato dei beni dell'alimentazione umana, ma non aveva ancora, se non in alcuni specifici settori, le tecnologie necessarie per accrescere in modo significativo la produttività del lavoro agricolo.

Questo stretto collegamento tra le forme storiche della carestia e quelle della crisi economica è emerso pienamente fin dalle ricerche con le quali Ernest Labrousse individuava, nei suoi volumi del 1933 e del 1944,⁸ le caratteristiche della *crise de type ancien*. Erano gli anni in cui si diffondevano le idee elaborate da Schumpeter sulle ragioni dell'andamento ciclico dell'economia capitalistica avanzata,⁹ e si diffondevano gli studi di Simiand, pubblicati nel 1932, sul ciclo economico e sul ruolo sociale del salario;¹⁰ e accanto a tutto ciò si propagavano anche le riflessioni con le quali Keynes negli stessi anni Venti e Trenta del Novecento individuava il ruolo della domanda nella fase di crisi economica attraverso cui passa, altrettanto ciclicamente, il sistema della produzione industriale.¹¹ Inserendosi in questo dibattito, Labrousse osservava che mentre in un sistema industriale avanzato la fase critica è caratterizzata dalla caduta della domanda, alla quale si accompagna una parallela caduta dell'offerta prodotta dal conseguente rallentamento della produzione, al contrario in un sistema preindustriale, largamente condizionato e spesso totalmente dominato dall'andamento della produzione agricola, la fase critica nasceva necessariamente dalla caduta dell'offerta, e in particolare dell'offerta degli strategici beni agricoli, alla quale non si accompagnava affatto una eventuale e parallela caduta della domanda. Anzi, ai primi segnali dell'apparire di

⁸ Labrousse, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix*; Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française*.

⁹ Schumpeter, *Teoria dello sviluppo economico*.

¹⁰ Simiand, *Le Salaire, l'évolution sociale*.

¹¹ Keynes, *A Treatise on Money*.

una situazione critica, quando l'offerta di beni agricoli cominciava a diminuire e i prezzi a salire, la domanda di questi beni, e specialmente di grano, non solo non cadeva, nell'età preindustriale, ma si manteneva sempre crescente ed anelastica. Essa era crescente perché le prime notizie dell'aumento dei prezzi dei beni dell'alimentazione umana, e soprattutto del frumento, spingevano immediatamente gli acquirenti ad accentuare la loro presenza nel mercato e a rafforzare le loro richieste, sia per procedere agli acquisti prima che i prezzi crescessero ulteriormente, sia per la prospettiva della sparizione dei beni dell'alimentazione dal mercato stesso; ed era inevitabilmente anche anelastica, poiché ovviamente dei beni dell'alimentazione non si poteva fare a meno, quali che fossero i loro prezzi, e li si acquistava fino al termine della disponibilità di risorse. Questo comportamento della domanda, opposto a quello che accade in un sistema capitalistico avanzato nel quale essa tende a calare di fronte al crescere dei prezzi, rivelava nelle epoche preindustriali il sopraggiungere della fase critica dell'economia, e tutto ciò coincideva, in effetti, con un periodo di prezzi alti del grano e degli altri alimenti umani, dunque con l'apparizione della carestia.¹²

Questa coincidenza tra carestia e crisi economica fu poi oggetto di vari ulteriori approfondimenti, e in particolare l'analisi di questo fenomeno fu ulteriormente sviluppata da Pierre Vilar,¹³ proprio nel volume che Fernand Braudel dedicò a Ernest Labrousse,¹⁴ e da Hermann Van der Wee, che, come è ben noto, partendo dall'esame dell'economia dei Paesi Bassi, consolidava le tesi di Labrousse e spostava decisamente all'indietro nel tempo i termini del problema, individuando la presenza del modello labroussiano della crisi già nell'età tardo medioevale.¹⁵ Nei mercati di quelle epoche questi meccanismi economici erano, infatti, ovunque ben presenti e assai diffusi. Accadeva, di fatto, che la variazione verso l'alto dei prezzi dei beni agricoli non potesse essere accompagnata da una parallela variazione nel breve periodo del livello dei salari, sia di quelli conferiti in moneta, soprattutto nei sistemi produttivi urbani, sia di quelli conferiti in beni agricoli; di conseguenza a parità di salario ai singoli soggetti economici restavano minori risorse per acquistare beni non agricoli, ovviamente meno vitali del cibo, e di conseguenza la domanda di questi ultimi tendeva a cadere, trascinando con sé il livello dei loro prezzi. Questo opposto andamento dei prezzi dei beni agricoli, in salita, e di quelli non agricoli, in discesa, è riscontrabile, pertanto, come basilare caratteristica delle carestie medievali e generalmente delle crisi economiche preindustriali. La rigidità complessiva nel breve periodo della domanda di beni agricoli, la sua impossibilità di presentarsi elastica sul mercato, il suo essere incapace di seguire e controbattere le eventuali variazioni dell'offerta, che invece proprio nel breve periodo raggiungeva la massima variabilità possibile, erano i segna-

¹² Sugli sviluppi ulteriori di questi ragionamenti cfr. Palermo, *Sviluppo economico*, 121 sgg.

¹³ Vilar, "Réflexions."

¹⁴ Braudel, *Conjoncture économique, structures sociales*.

¹⁵ Van der Wee, "Typologie des crises."

li della sua debolezza ed erano le ragioni del predominio dell'offerta nella formazione dei prezzi del frumento e degli altri beni dell'alimentazione umana.

Ma questa congiunzione tra crisi economica e carestia è già ben presente anche nelle economie maggiormente sviluppate del periodo storico di cui qui ci occupiamo. Possiamo tentare, dunque, di spingere ancora più indietro nel tempo la presenza dei meccanismi della *crise de type ancien*. Queste caratteristiche della crisi economica basso medievale europea emergono, ad esempio, con grande evidenza negli studi di Giuliano Pinto, che in un saggio dedicato alle vicende fiorentine della carestia del 1346 riportava, dapprima, i dati relativi alla caduta della produzione agricola e passava, subito dopo, ad analizzare il funzionamento del mercato e dei prezzi che in essi correivano.¹⁶ La fase critica trecentesca dell'economia fiorentina veniva così studiata non solo nei dati della caduta della produzione dei beni agricoli, fenomeno ovviamente ciclicamente atteso in quelle epoche, ma anche e soprattutto nelle conseguenze che questa situazione riversava sui livelli sul mercato urbano e sui prezzi in esso correnti, cioè sugli strumenti economici da cui dipendeva per una larga parte della popolazione la possibilità di accedere al cibo. Ed entrando nell'esame minuzioso dei provvedimenti che in quelle difficili circostanze le pubbliche autorità prendevano per rifornire il mercato con grani importati a spese dell'erario pubblico e per mantenere il più possibile stabile il livello dei prezzi, Giuliano Pinto affrontava inevitabilmente anche la tematica del rapporto tra carestia e disuguaglianza, osservando che "le carestie, è stato detto giustamente, non furono un fenomeno egualitario, come, almeno in parte le pestilenze, ma incisero diversamente sulle varie classi sociali, esasperandone i contrasti, e contribuendo, in qualche misura, a modificarne la struttura".¹⁷ E a tutto ciò si aggiungevano i dati relativi alla produzione e ai prezzi dei beni non agricoli. E infatti, la limitata elasticità della capacità di acquisto dei salari, che nel breve periodo non poteva seguire l'andamento in crescita dei prezzi dei beni agricoli, spingeva, come già si è osservato, alla concentrazione della domanda verso gli indispensabili beni dell'alimentazione ("molti furono costretti ad impiegare tutti i loro guadagni – e spesso non furono sufficienti – per assicurarsi il nutrimento"),¹⁸ e tutto ciò portava alla caduta tendenziale dei consumi dei beni non agricoli e quindi inevitabilmente della loro produzione ("Non c'è dubbio che tale concentrazione delle spese portò ad una flessione della domanda dei generi non di prima necessità, provocando una stasi, un rallentamento in alcune attività economiche").¹⁹ Va naturalmente accolto l'invito dell'autore a non generalizzare la presenza di questi fenomeni, e tuttavia appare evidente che in una città fortemente produttiva e mercantile, qual era in quelle epoche Firenze, i meccanismi economici della crisi labroussiana

¹⁶ Pinto, "Firenze e la carestia del 1346."

¹⁷ Pinto, 40.

¹⁸ Pinto, 40.

¹⁹ Pinto, 40-1.

d'ancien type cominciavano già ad emergere con le loro basilari conseguenze economiche e sociali.

3. *Carestia e crisi economica nella Roma basso medievale*

In linea con quanto accadeva nelle città italiane ed europee all'epoca maggiormente sviluppate, nel periodo di tempo qui preso in considerazione anche la città di Roma andò incontro ad una fase di grandi difficoltà economiche e sociali che, tra gli ultimi decenni del Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento, investirono non solo la città e i suoi abitanti, ma anche il distretto territoriale da cui essa traeva i suoi rifornimenti alimentari.²⁰ E anche nel caso romano, il sopraggiungere dei momenti critici è segnalato in modo immediato dall'andamento dei prezzi di mercato dei beni agricoli proprio nei decenni in cui le carestie innalzavano periodicamente quasi dappertutto in Europa i livelli dei prezzi dei beni dell'alimentazione. E come ovunque in quelle epoche, anche nelle vicende di questa città il legame inestricabile tra la crisi economica e la carestia produceva, a sua volta, forme di disuguaglianza nella distribuzione dei redditi e dei patrimoni. Nel 1348, poi, la peste fece la sua apparizione distruttiva, proseguendo la propria opera nei decenni successivi. E questo complesso di problematiche economiche e demografiche veniva ulteriormente aggravato dalla fragilità delle strutture produttive e di scambio propriamente urbane e dalla debolezza delle istituzioni politiche ed amministrative, soprattutto nella fase storica che vide Roma dal 1305 al 1377 privata della presenza della corte papale, insediata in Avignone.

Come è ben noto, le fonti romane non sempre permettono di ricostruire nei dettagli questi passaggi storico-economici, essendo andata totalmente perduta, per il periodo qui studiato, la documentazione prodotta dalle istituzioni urbane, ed essendo ugualmente assai carente quella che noi definiremmo privata.²¹ E tuttavia ai fini di questa ricostruzione si è rivelata molto utile la documentazione prodotta nella curia papale e quella che ci è pervenuta dalle comunità del distretto territoriale dell'Urbe, cioè dall'area produttiva agricola dal quale essa traeva in prima istanza gran parte dei suoi rifornimenti; è stato possibile, in tal modo, ricostruire alcune serie dei prezzi trecenteschi dei cereali, che rivelano con grande evidenza il sopraggiungere delle carestie, e alcuni dati relativi alla produzione granaria in alcune aree del distretto; ma è stato anche possibile esaminare le forme e le caratteristiche delle poli-

²⁰ Per una interpretazione dell'andamento ciclico della vita economica romana basso medievale si rinvia a Palermo, *Sviluppo economico*, 284 sgg.

²¹ La situazione delle fonti economiche romane due-trecentesche è stata più volte esaminata dalla storiografia; qui si rinvia ai saggi e alla relativa bibliografia presenti in Hubert, *Roma nei secoli XIII e XIV*; e in Esposito, Palermo, *Economia e società a Roma*; si veda inoltre, Hubert, *Espace urbain et habitat à Rome*; Vendittelli, *Mercanti-banchieri romani*; Lori Sanfilippo, *La Roma dei Romani*; Palermo, *Il mercato romano*.

tiche annonarie imposte nel mercato romano e distrettuale sia dalle autorità comunali come anche dai papi e dalla loro curia.²² E, quasi a compensare la scarsità dei dati quantitativi e istituzionali, ci sono pervenute alcune cronache che, ben vagliate dagli studiosi, sono apparse dotate di grande attendibilità. Facciamo qui riferimento soprattutto, ma non solamente, ai testi dell'Anonimo Romano e di Giovanni Villani,²³ che nei loro racconti, accanto ad alcuni dati di incerta valutazione, presentano in realtà un quadro assai efficace di ciò che accadeva nella Roma basso medievale attraversata dalla crisi economica e dalla carestia, e presentano, in modo del tutto credibile, gli interessi, le disuguaglianze e i conflitti sociali che in quelle circostanze sorgevano in città.²⁴

Le vicende economiche bassomedievali della città di Roma appaiono sostanzialmente innestate sull'andamento ciclico dell'economia europea. Dopo una lunga fase di espansione, l'economia e la demografia della città di Roma diedero i primi segnali di un ribaltamento della situazione già negli ultimi decenni del XIII secolo.²⁵ Uno degli indicatori più significativi di questo fenomeno è costituito dal collasso, già nella seconda metà del Duecento, del capitale mercantile romano, ben diffuso in precedenza dappertutto in Europa e nel Mediterraneo, dalle fiere della Champagne ai porti africani.²⁶ Nei primi decenni del Trecento, poi, lo spazio urbano abitato cominciò a contrarsi, come ha appurato con grande accuratezza Étienne Hubert, mentre la popolazione si avviava a diminuire di numero ben prima dell'arrivo della peste nera nel 1348;²⁷ e in aggiunta a tutto ciò la città rimaneva priva di un sistema politico e istituzionale di rilievo internazionale, qual era la corte papale, in grado di guidarla ed eventualmente sostenerla nella fase negativa alla quale andava incontro.²⁸

In questo stesso periodo le carestie, cioè il principale segnale del passaggio di una fase critica, fecero anche a Roma la loro apparizione con scadenze cicliche comprese tra i cinque e i dieci anni. Questi fenomeni appaiono già registrati negli eventi urbani degli ultimi due decenni del Duecento, e ritornano costantemente nei primi cinque o sei decenni del Trecento e nella maggior parte dei casi rivelano una significativa gravità. Insieme all'andamento ciclico annuale dei prezzi del grano, picchi periodicamente assai alti degli stessi prezzi fecero la loro apparizione nel mercato romano e nel territorio del *districtus Urbis*, con una certa regolarità tendenzialmente decennale, negli anni 1282-4, 1315-7, 1328, 1338-9, 1347, 1353.²⁹ Si tratta, in linea di massima, delle stesse date della diffusione delle carestie a livello europeo; Roma, infatti, anche se per tanti versi appare in quei decenni sostanzialmente isolata nel

²² Cfr. Palermo, *Mercati del grano a Roma*.

²³ Anonimo Romano, *Cronica*; Villani, *Cronica*.

²⁴ Cfr. Palermo, "Carestie e cronisti nel Trecento;" Palermo, "Di fronte alla crisi."

²⁵ Cfr. le accurate analisi presenti in Hubert, "Rome au XIV^e siècle."

²⁶ Cfr. Vendittelli, *Mercanti-banchieri romani*; Ait, "All'ombra del papato."

²⁷ Hubert, "Population et habitat à Rome."

²⁸ Cfr. Rehberg, "Eine Metropole ohne Haupt?"

²⁹ Cfr. Palermo, *Mercati del grano a Roma*.

contesto economico internazionale, non poteva ovviamente non risentire di ciò che accadeva, di positivo come anche di negativo, nel sistema dell'economia europea. E se attorno alla metà del XIII secolo in tutte le principali città e regioni dell'Europa occidentale cominciavano ad apparire delle importanti innovazioni nelle politiche dei approvvigionamenti alimentari, con la creazione di speciali uffici destinati a garantire in ogni modo il rifornimento e il funzionamento dei mercati nei quali questi beni venivano domandati e offerti,³⁰ ebbero questi fenomeni apparvero nello stesso periodo di tempo anche nell'Urbe e si manifestarono con continuità nelle fasi storiche comprese tra gli ultimi decenni del Duecento e la prima metà del Trecento, quando anche la vita economica della città venne segnata da ciò che contemporaneamente accadeva in gran parte dell'Europa occidentale. Non a caso, uno dei primi segnali dell'arrivo delle tensioni sui prezzi dei cereali è costituito già negli anni Ottanta del Duecento dalla apparizione a Roma della figura dei *grascerii*, funzionari comunali addetti ai rifornimenti granari della città. Attraverso l'opera di questi ufficiali i romani imponevano che l'intera produzione granaria del distretto, e soprattutto della zona fortemente produttiva della Tuscia, fosse avviata verso la città, lasciando ovviamente ad ogni località l'indispensabile per la sopravvivenza e permettendo che i centri di media grandezza (un esempio importante è rappresentato dalla situazione di Viterbo) si rifornissero dalle zone ad essi circostanti. All'interno del *districtus* romano si venne, dunque, a formare nei decenni due-trecenteschi qui presi in considerazione, un vero e proprio mercato distrettuale del grano, nel quale il percorso del bene era prefigurato e controllato; esso poteva essere spostato dalle località di produzione ai centri intermedi di raccolta e da questi, per via di terra, di fiume o di mare, a Roma; era proibito anche il semplice trasporto del grano da una località periferica all'altra, ed era impedita in ogni modo l'esportazione tranne che negli anni di particolare abbondanza.³¹ All'interno di questa rete di trasporti precostituiti i mercanti di grano erano lasciati liberi di svolgere la propria attività e venivano, anzi, favoriti in ogni modo, tra l'altro con la totale esenzione dal pagamento di qualsiasi gabella; non a caso la documentazione della seconda metà del Trecento rivela, poi, la potenza economica raggiunta dagli addetti al trasporto e al commercio del grano che erano pienamente inseriti nel gruppo comunale dominante e arrivavano a trattare da pari a pari con gli stessi esponenti dell'aristocrazia magnatizia. La documentazione prodotta dalla curia papale conferma questa impostazione delle politiche annonarie. Ci sono pervenuti, in particolare, due documenti, rispettivamente, del 1283 e del 1299, da cui emergono alcune importanti informazioni. Nel primo, che risale all'epoca di Martino IV, il papa lanciava un monito ai *grascerii* romani perché non molestassero gli abitanti di Civitavecchia durante la requisizione del grano necessario per Roma; con il secondo, emesso da Bonifacio VIII, il pontefice

³⁰ Cfr Palermo, "Politiche contro la carestia."

³¹ Palermo, 103 sgg.

entrava invece nel merito dei criteri stessi dei rifornimenti granari, con una decisione destinata ad avere anche in seguito un grande rilievo: anche il papa proibiva, infatti, il trasporto del grano da un luogo all'altro della provincia del Patrimonio, cioè dell'area laziale settentrionale forte produttrice di derrate cerealicole, senza uno speciale permesso del rettore, cioè del funzionario pontificio preposto alla guida dell'amministrazione provinciale.³²

4. *La carestia come redistribuzione disuguale e conflittuale della ricchezza*

Anche nel caso romano l'idea di una carestia provocata solo da situazioni climatologiche disastrose è sostanzialmente insostenibile, e comunque insufficiente a spiegare il senso di ciò che accadeva nel mercato urbano: la situazione dei raccolti, la loro sufficienza o insufficienza, la loro maggiore o minore abbondanza, anche provocata dal maltempo, costituiva la base di partenza, all'epoca a tutti ben nota e continuamente attesa, sulla quale poi interveniva la volontà e la capacità di organizzazione dei gruppi dirigenti cittadini. È dunque nell'analisi delle strutture socio-economiche urbane che vanno ricercate le ragioni profonde della piega drammatica che questi eventi finivano quasi sempre per assumere. In questo contesto la storia delle carestie romane dei decenni qui presi in esame si intreccia in modo inestricabile con la storia delle lotte per il controllo politico della città, del suo distretto e delle vie di comunicazione lungo le quali viaggiavano i carichi dei beni agricoli; e in queste circostanze la lettura delle cronache ci aiuta spesso a comprendere come funzionassero questi meccanismi economici e politici e quali risultati raggiungessero.

La cronaca di Saba Malaspina ci permette, ad esempio, di gettare uno sguardo su quello che accadde a Roma dopo l'episodio della rivolta del Vespro in Sicilia, che fu carica di conseguenze sui livelli dei rifornimenti granari diretti alle città italiane. Nel 1284 scoppiò a Roma una rivolta popolare: *Populus romanus occasione grassie seu victualium caristie versus Capitolium contra Goffredum de Dracone, vicarium regis in Urbe [...] seditione facta impetuose procedunt, et in plano Capitolii quadam die sabati congregati [...] quendam Iohannem Cintii Malabranche militem, civem romanum, in eorum capitaneum erexerunt et vicarium regis predictum per menses duos quasi captivum tenuerunt.*³³ Non si trattava, quindi, di una rivolta disperata e priva di sbocchi istituzionali; la lotta contro la *caristia* produceva, in realtà, una riforma istituzionale, che lo stesso pontefice era poi costretto ad approvare, anche se disponeva che il predetto capitano si dovesse interessare solo dell'ufficio della *grassia*.³⁴

³² Palermo, 177 sgg.

³³ *Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*, 353-4.

³⁴ *Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*, 354.

Con l'avanzare del Trecento e con l'acuirsi della crisi economica, di cui la carestia era appunto la manifestazione più dolorosa ed evidente, anche a Roma gli scontri sociali si allontanavano sempre più dalla forma di una pura sedizione dettata dalla fame e accentuavano le loro caratteristiche politiche, spesso dirette ad obiettivi di trasformazioni istituzionali, come del resto accadeva in quelle epoche in numerose città italiane.³⁵ Appare, in particolare, la sostanziale concomitanza tra le varie fasi della lotta contro le carestie e i vari momenti della lotta comunale anti-magnatizia: il mercato e in generale un sistema di scambi largamente basato sulla circolazione monetaria rendevano, infatti, ben visibili i termini della crisi proprio attraverso l'andamento dei prezzi,³⁶ e facevano dei detentori della rendita agraria i nemici politici ed economici dell'organizzazione comunale urbana. In tutte queste circostanze le disuguaglianze economiche emergevano in tutte le loro forme e la carestia diveniva, in tal modo, spesso strumento di lotta e di ricatto politico e sociale che aveva nel mercato il suo principale luogo di scontro: far mancare i rifornimenti al mercato urbano era una delle principali armi dei magnati, ed era un fenomeno che assai spesso accompagnava anche le iniziative che noi definiremmo più direttamente militari; e naturalmente, poteva accadere anche l'opposto, e cioè che il porre termine alla carestia divenisse, a sua volta, un potente strumento di creazione del consenso a vantaggio dei gruppi sociali che intendevano conquistare o mantenere il potere. Esaminati da questo punto di vista i testi cronachistici, confrontati peraltro con i dati provenienti da altre fonti documentarie, ci rivelano che il controllo politico della città era quasi sempre nelle mani di chi riusciva a rifornirla di derrate alimentari.

Dopo gli eventi connessi alla grande carestia europea del 1315-7, che per l'area romana noi conosciamo attraverso i dati che ci sono pervenuti dall'amministrazione della pontificia della Tuscia,³⁷ uno degli episodi più significativi risale al 1329. Durante il senatorato di Roberto d'Angiò, il suo vicario Guglielmo d'Eboli non riuscì a controllare la carestia che in quell'anno si andava diffondendo; di conseguenza, il 4 febbraio di quell'anno *a romore si levò il popolo*, il Campidoglio fu assalito e il vicario del re scacciato. I romani, scrive Giovanni Villani, fecero senatori Stefano Colonna e Poncello Orsini *i quali del loro grano e di quello degli altri possenti romani feciono venire in piazza, e racquetarono il popolo*.³⁸ Con poche ma significative parole il cronista ci ri-

³⁵ Cfr. Palermo, "Carestia, guerra e mercato."

³⁶ Si vedano, a questo proposito, le analisi dell'andamento dei prezzi a Firenze presenti in Pinto, *Il libro del Biadaio*.

³⁷ Cfr. Palermo, *Mercati del grano a Roma*, 317 sgg. Sui coevi episodi di gravi carestie in Europa vedi Lucas, "The Great European Famine;" Van Werveke, "La famine de l'an 1316;" Jordan, *The Great Famine*; Kershaw, "The Great Famine."

³⁸ *In questi tempi, a dì 4 di febbraio, essendo in Roma sanatore per lo re Ruberto messer Guglielmo d'Eboli suo barone con trecento cavalieri alla guardia della terra, i Romani avendo grande carestia di vittuaglia per lo grande caro che generalmente era per tutta Italia, dogliendosi del re Ruberto che non gli forniva del Regno, a romore si levò il popolo, gridando: «muoia il sanatore»; e corsono in Campidoglio assalendolo aspramente: il quale con tutta sua gente non poté resistere; sì s'arrendé e uscì della signoria con grande danno e vergogna; e' Romani*

vela come la città fosse facile vittima del ricatto nobiliare. I *possenti romani*, cioè gli esponenti della classe baronale e i ricchi mercanti che commerciavano il grano da essi prodotto, rifornirono la città di derrate alimentari solo dopo aver creato una situazione di carestia che aveva consentito la presa del potere da parte dei due esponenti dei Colonna e degli Orsini. La distribuzione ineguale della proprietà dei cereali definiva dapprima i termini dell'apparizione della carestia, e subito dopo quelli della conquista della supremazia politica da parte dei magnati proprietari delle derrate agricole.

Di ciò che accadde, sempre a Roma, circa dieci anni più tardi, nel 1338, ci informa con precisione l'Anonimo: *Infinite femmine fuoro le quali iettaro loro onore per avere dello pane. Moita iente vennéo soa franchia per lo pane. Fuoro vennute palazza, possessioni de campi e vigne, e dati per poca cosa, per avere dello pane. Granne era la pecunia che se numerava per poca de annona avere. Chi abbe grano abbe tutte le adornamenta delle donne.*³⁹ Il cronista registrava, dunque, gli spostamenti che nel corso della carestia di quell'anno si ebbero nella distribuzione della ricchezza, e in particolare nella proprietà delle case e delle terre vendute per acquistare il cibo necessario alla sopravvivenza, e sottolinea le condizioni della disuguaglianza crescente tra i detentori del grano e coloro che non ne avevano ed erano costretti a comprarlo a qualunque prezzo. E le forme della disuguaglianza vengono ulteriormente poste in evidenza quando il cronista passa a descrivere le condizioni di un *ricco massaro*, il quale in piena carestia aveva *ricchezze moita: fanti, fantesche assai, pecora, vuovi, iumente, campi seminati, pozzi pieni de grano*;⁴⁰ è evidente, dunque, che in un episodio di carestia non tutti vivevano e si nutrivano nelle stesse condizioni: essa rovinava i piccoli proprietari terrieri inurbati, che erano costretti a svendere, per sopravvivere, i campi, le vigne e il loro palazzo in città, mentre faceva la fortuna dei grandi proprietari e dei mercanti di grano che diversificavano i propri investimenti, indirizzandoli al commercio, alla produzione agraria e all'allevamento del bestiame. Nell'ambito della città la carestia era da questo punto di vista uno strumento di redistribuzione dei patrimoni e in generale delle varie forme della ricchezza.

Dieci anni ancora più tardi, nel 1347, le fasi dell'ascesa e della repentina caduta del tribuno Cola di Rienzo sono segnate dalle vicende della carestia. In vista dell'imminente Giubileo del 1350, che avrebbe potuto risollevare almeno in parte le condizioni economiche della città, Cola e il blocco sociale che lo sosteneva intendevano liberare il mercato urbano dal ricatto della carestia indotta dai baroni. Come racconta l'Anonimo, Cola di Rienzo, nella fase in cui si preparava a prendere il potere, diceva ai romani: *Le vostre terre non se arano. Per bona fede che llo iubileo se approssima. Voi non site proveduti*

feciono loro sanatori messer Stefano della Colonna e messer Poncello Orsini, i quali del loro grano e di quello degli altri possenti romani feciono venire in piazza, e racquetarono il popolo (Villani, *Cronica*, X, 117).

³⁹ Anonimo Romano, *Cronica*, 34-5.

⁴⁰ Anonimo Romano, 36.

della annona e delle vettuaglie,⁴¹ mettendo in evidenza che il mancato rifornimento degli alimenti di base, già incerto in tempi per così dire normali, avrebbe impedito di reggere i ritmi economici richiesti dalla concentrazione dei pellegrini; né il pontefice avrebbe consentito a proclamare l'anno santo in una città sguarnita delle necessarie riserve alimentari. E infatti, sempre nel racconto dell'Anonimo, il programma politico di Cola prevedeva *che li baroni deiano tenere le strade secure e non recipere li latroni e li malefattori, e che deiano fare la grascia; e che in ciasche rione de Roma sia uno granaro e che se provveda dello grano per lo tempo la quale deo venire.*⁴² Cola non ebbe tuttavia forze ed appoggi sufficienti per portare a termine personalmente i suoi programmi, e la sua caduta nel dicembre dello stesso 1347 coincise essenzialmente con un ulteriore rivolgimento politico provocato, come al solito, dalla mancanza di grano. L'Anonimo ci informa con grande chiarezza: era l'autunno inoltrato, dopo la vendemmia, e il grano divenne assai caro e *questo toleva la pecunia a chi l'aveva*,⁴³ cioè erano maggiormente colpiti i ceti artigianali e mercantili cittadini; il cardinale legato si mise d'accordo con i Savelli e con i Colonna e di fatto scattò immediatamente il ricatto della carestia: *Allora le strade fuoro chiuse. Li massari delle terre non portavano lo grano a Roma.*⁴⁴ Anche Cola fu dunque vittima del meccanismo che egli stesso aveva visto operare e che aveva lucidamente tentato di bloccare.

Ma la carestia era anche assai rischiosa per i potenti. Un ulteriore episodio del 1353 ci conferma l'uso spregiudicato della carestia da parte della nobiltà terriera e la piena consapevolezza che i cronisti avevano di ciò. Nel febbraio di quell'anno una rivolta popolare si concluse con la lapidazione del senatore Bertoldo Orsini, che insieme all'altro senatore, anche lui nobile e della famiglia dei Colonna, era accusato di esportare il grano per mare *fòra de Roma*, di conseguenza il grano in città era *carissimo*.⁴⁵ E la stessa notizia è confermata da Matteo Villani, che narra che i due senatori *da popolo erano infamati d'aver venduto la tratta, e lasciato trarre il grano della loro Maremma, e questo era fatto per loro, non pensando che 'l grano andasse in così alta carestia.*⁴⁶ E l'Anonimo concludeva, a sua volta, il racconto dello stesso episodio con una ironia che ci fa comprendere quanto chiari fossero ormai questi meccanismi: *Vedi maraviglia! Saputa che fu la morte dello senatore lapidato la carestia de subito cessao per lo paese intorno e fu convenevole derrata de grano.*⁴⁷

Dunque, per comprendere le ragioni per le quali le carestie divenivano abitualmente, in una città come Roma, importanti occasioni di ridistribuzione conflittuale dei patrimoni e dei redditi e della loro capacità di acquisto,

⁴¹ Anonimo Romano, 109.

⁴² Anonimo Romano, 114.

⁴³ Anonimo Romano, 153.

⁴⁴ Anonimo Romano, 153.

⁴⁵ Anonimo Romano, 164.

⁴⁶ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, III, 57.

⁴⁷ Anonimo Romano, *Cronica*, 164.

è necessario integrare i dati dei prezzi con l'analisi delle vicende politiche e sociali che a loro volta condizionavano il ruolo e le modalità del funzionamento del mercato. Di fatto, una legislazione antimagnatizia di tipo fiorentino si realizzava a Roma solo con gli Statuti del 1363, quando la città era ormai guidata dalla *Felix Societas* dei balestrieri e dei pavesati, rigida organizzazione politico-militare al servizio degli interessi del comune;⁴⁸ e Matteo Villani metteva orgogliosamente in risalto come la nuova istituzione dei *banderesi con grande potestà e balia* in senso antimagnatizio fosse stata creata proprio ad imitazione di ciò che già funzionava così bene a Firenze.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cfr. Maire Vigueur, "La Felice «Societas»."

⁴⁹ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, IX, 87.

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Inequalities in access to the food market: the city as a producer of norms in the fourteenth century (Low Countries)

by Alexis Wilkin

L'articolo esamina l'organizzazione diseguale del mercato del grano nei Paesi Bassi nel XIV secolo. Successivamente, analizza il modo in cui alcune città compensavano le loro difficoltà di accesso al cibo affermando la propria leadership sui centri demici secondari e sul loro *hinterland*, e il modo in cui la legislazione urbana garantiva specifici privilegi di accesso a determinate categorie di acquirenti o venditori. Infine, l'articolo discute la cautela che deve essere esercitata quando si cerca di collegare la fioritura della legislazione urbana nel XIV secolo al contesto di crisi ripetute tipico di quel periodo.

This article examines the unequal organisation of the grain market in the Low Countries in the fourteenth century. It looks in turn at the ways in which several towns compensated for their difficulties in accessing food by asserting their leadership over secondary towns and their hinterland, and at the ways in which urban legislation guaranteed specific privileges of access to certain categories of buyers or sellers. Finally, the article discusses the caution that must be exercised in attempting to relate the flowering of urban legislation in the fourteenth century to the context of repeated crises during that century.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Paesi Bassi, mercato alimentare, diseguglianze, legislazione urbana.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Low Countries, food market, inequality, urban regulation.

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1. Introduction

The concept of inequality has many possible definitions.¹ Its use requires us to specify the analytical perspective adopted. In the most common sense of the term, in economic history, the concept of inequality is mainly applied to the uneven distribution of wealth or income, and the extent to which it is concentrated in a few hands: economists such as the precursor Pareto, Kuznets, Piketty and Milanovic, and historians such as Scheidel and Alfani, illustrate this perspective.² It is not the one on which this article is based. Other definitions of inequality take a broader view, distinguishing between ‘inequalities of outcomes’ (covered by economic history) and ‘inequalities of opportunities’.³ The latter category refers to factors that create or entrench situations of inequality between individuals or communities of individuals and can affect access to income and wealth. These factors can include gender, age, disability, etc. And these inequalities can also be created or maintained by legislation or administrative regulations, which rigidify the specific advantages granted to certain categories of individuals, to the detriment of others.⁴ The reasons for these trade-offs are diverse: power relationships, shared beliefs or feelings of belonging, etc. Our article focuses on these ‘inequalities of opportunity’, by examining the way in which access to the food market was organised in an unequal manner in a particularly prosperous area of medieval Europe, the Low Countries. More specifically, we will focus on the trade in cereals, the staple food, up until the modern era.

The fourteenth century saw the consecration of the urban phenomenon, marked by the concentration of sometimes densely populated towns in a compact area. They gained considerable political autonomy and were at the origin of legislation that systematically regulated the food trade, as we shall see below. This was despite the fact that, in North-Western Europe, this was also the century of crises (the Great Famine of 1315-7, or the Black Death) which may have had a direct effect on inequalities, understood this time in the classic sense of the distribution of wealth and income. Despite the effects of the food and health crises, and despite the demographic contraction, the town remained a significant social phenomenon.

¹ I would like to thank Mathieu Arnoux (EHESS), Stef Espeel (University of Antwerp) and Lise Saussus (EHESS) for their valuable comments and suggestions, as well as the anonymous reviewer.

² On this subject, see the survey by Jackson, “Old Inequality,” the recent volume edited by Nigro, *Disuguaglianza Economica nelle Società Preindustriali*, and especially in this one, Malanima, “Ineguaglianze economiche,” 4-18 and Alfani, “Economic Inequality,” 21-36. See also: Alfani, Gierok, Schaff, “Inequality in preindustrial Germany” and Alfani, Garcia-Montero, “Inequality in pre-industrial England.”

³ See in particular the United Nations clarifying note, prepared by Alfonso, LaFleur, Alarcó, “Concepts of Inequality.”

⁴ On gender, see De Pleijt, van Zanden, “Gender wage inequality,” 611-38 and below.

Although the market is just one of many ways in which people gained access to food, it was certainly one of the most significant in the Late Middle Ages. From the eleventh-twelfth century, a 'commercial revolution' began to take place, one that has been particularly scrutinised by English historians.⁵ The medieval urban market, and particularly the food market, was not left to its own devices, but was firmly framed by legislative and administrative control, a perspective now at the heart of historians' work inspired by the framework of the New Institutional Economics.⁶ This activity has been analysed by numerous historians, who have pointed out the sometimes competing moral and economic rationales, and tried to unravel the determining factors. However, research has not systematically dissected the way in which the organisation of the market favoured certain sectoral interests. To do this, we need to go beyond the analysis that distinguishes between the interests of consumers – a category that is once again arousing the curiosity of economic historians – and those of sellers.⁷ These interests sometimes converge: for example, consumers and sellers derive an undeniable benefit from the prosperity of the market. But they obviously diverge on the question of price, as sellers can benefit from the scarcity of transactions. Above

all, the categories of sellers and consumers do a poor job of masking the fact that within each of these, certain sectors or human groups are privileged, to the detriment of others.

This contribution will: 1) focus on 'inequalities' in terms of access to infrastructures that facilitate trade organisation (geographical position; direct access to a rich hinterland). These inequalities, which arise from the interaction of human communities with geography, sometimes provoke a reaction. For example, urban communities sometimes adopt a proactive or even parasitic policy to compensate for the 'structural' disadvantages of their position. This policy of correcting certain disadvantages amplifies the 'natural' inequalities in access to food, from one space to another. 2) the second axis analysed will relate to the way in which urban regulations advantage or disadvantage certain categories of urban actors, creating de facto inequalities or preferential distortions within the city itself. It is not a question of pretending to identify an absolute consistency in practices, from city to city, or even within a given urban space – the texts in question rarely yield unilaterally to sectoral interests, but interweave concerns of general interest with specific concerns. Moreover, in such a short text, we will not claim to be exhaustive: we will choose specific examples taken from a few well-studied towns, in particular Liège, which we know well, and Flemish towns that are well covered by an

⁵ Britnell, *Commercialisation*.

⁶ Just one example of the institutional framework given to the market and its importance: Dijkman, *Shaping Medieval Markets*.

⁷ On the subject of the medieval consumer, we refer in particular to the fine introductory pages of Petrowiste, "Consommateurs," which clearly shows the evolution of the question since Henri Pirenne's first reflections.

abundant historiography. We will conclude by returning to the chronology, showing the difficulty of inserting the regulations of the fourteenth century into the sequence of crises (famines and epidemics), remembering the limitations of legislative sources, and broadening our thinking by recalling the importance of non-market logics and other types of inequality in access to food.

2. Meeting urban demand: structural inequalities in access and demographic tensions

Medieval towns brought together within their walls a large number of food consumers who were only partly food producers.⁸ This is despite the fact that, in many medieval towns, there were gardens and communal areas within the town or in peri-urban areas, forming a ‘provisioning zone’ (in French: *ceinture alimentaire*).⁹ But this immediate adjacent production was insufficient to meet demand. In the Low Countries, as in many other places, towns quickly seized the power to regulate access to food, its quality and trade. This legislative and administrative phenomenon began at different times in different places (from the beginning of the twelfth century in Liège, where the bishop nevertheless continued to be a political partner; in the second half of the twelfth century in Flanders; at the end of the fourteenth century in Sint-Truiden, when the town’s ‘communal’ autonomy was recognised), but crystallised during the period that concerns us here. The first half of the fourteenth century saw an acceleration in food supervision, accompanying the general trend towards the establishment of a political framework that accompanied the new town as an area with a large degree of autonomy.¹⁰ It was above all in the fifteenth century that the assertion of higher powers – the Dukes of Burgundy a.o. – marked a reduction in this political autonomy, and saw certain central interventions in the management of supply affairs. The royal or imperial level, which was still predominant in the Carolingian era, has since faded away.

Regulating access to food in the town is also linked to one of the determining factors of demand, the number of consumers. For the Low Countries, the rate of urbanisation varies considerably, depending on whether you consider Luxembourg, which is virtually ‘devoid of towns’, or Flanders, which

⁸ The subject of urban-rural relations is immense. We will limit ourselves here to a few key titles, most of which relate to the areas at the heart of our work: Epstein, *Town and Country*; Higounet, *L’approvisionnement des villes*; van Cruyningen, Thoen *Food supply, demand and trade*, 1-6 and Wilkin, “Organiser l’approvisionnement urbain,” 2018.

⁹ For the earliest periods, the fundamental work is that of Goodson, *Cultivating the City*; a rapid and not very analytical summary can be found in Leguay, *Terres urbaines*.

¹⁰ In general, see Devroey, “Food and Politics” and Pinto, “Food Security.” Over and above the differences in terms of the acquisition of decision-making powers, it should be noted that the urban legislation that has been preserved – it means the administrative decisions issued by the magistrate –, is sometimes very late. But it is maybe also a reflection of archival conservation.

represents the other end of the spectrum, i.e. one of the most urbanized areas in Europe, often compared to Central-Northern Italy in its economic development.¹¹ Providing population figures for the pre-Black Death period is a challenge, given the lack of eloquent and reliable tax sources. Population estimates often relate to the end of the fifteenth century, or even the sixteenth. Here are some regularly quoted figures: around 1356-8 – i.e. after the Black Death – the city of Ghent had around 64.000 inhabitants, which would indicate that it was probably even more densely populated before the epidemic; Bruges had around 46.000 inhabitants around 1338-40, before the Black Death,¹² and Ypres, circa 25.000 inhabitants around 1310. As much as the absolute figures, town by town, it is the aggregate level of urbanisation that determines a strong demand for food, especially in the Flemish context where, at the end of the fifteenth century, 36% of the population lived in towns. Elsewhere, if we set aside Luxembourg, which is almost entirely unurbanized (15% of the population living in very small towns), we find mainly medium-sized towns in Hainaut, Brabant and the Principality of Liège. Here the figures vary, but estimates for Mons and Valenciennes at the end of the fifteenth century range from 10.000 to 13.000 inhabitants; for Liège, estimates put the population at 20.000 to 25.000 before 1468, when the city was destroyed.¹³ These figures should also be compared with others, such as the size of Paris in 1328, which had between 210.000 and 270.000 inhabitants, whereas most of the major Italian towns of the time had no more than 100.000 inhabitants.¹⁴ More than absolute size, it was the concentration of demand in a small area that created significant pressure and a degree of inter-urban competition for access to food.

This population distribution already creates disparities – we won't say 'inequalities' in the strict sense here – in terms of demand for food. To this we must add other contrasts in terms of supply: on the one hand, in terms of the productive capacity of the natural hinterland of cities; on the other, in terms of their interconnection with more distant areas. Flanders is obviously particularly concerned. Admittedly, the performance of its agriculture has been underestimated, and sometimes painted a miserable picture.¹⁵ Since the work of Verhulst, Thoen and Soens, the performance of some of its regions has been largely revised upwards.¹⁶ However, it has long been known that, despite this productivity, the aggregate level of demand in certain urban centres has exceeded local capacity, necessitating the import of resources from further afield. The 'granaries' of the major Flemish cities were located in the

¹¹ Demographic estimates, always very random, in the various contributions collected in *Le réseau urbain en Belgique*.

¹² Figures proposed by Blockmans, "Tussen crisis en welvaart," 42-52.

¹³ Vrancken-Pirson, "Contribution," 7-24.

¹⁴ Bove, Gauvard, *Le Paris du Moyen Âge*, 7.

¹⁵ Nicholas, "Of Poverty and Primacy."

¹⁶ Thoen, Soens, "The Low Countries, 1000-1750."

neighbouring regions: Artois, Somme, Hainaut and Tournaisis, sometimes England and as far as the Baltic, which was more systematically involved at the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Or, in exceptional cases, Mediterranean countries: Basque, Catalan, Majorcan and Genoese traders could take advantage of high prices in the Low Countries to sell off certain stocks. An early example can be seen in April 1317, during the great famine of 1315-7: in Bruges,¹⁸ Italian merchants were able to make up for local shortages by supplying 1.414 tonnes of grain for a sum equivalent to one year's annual municipal budget. This proactive policy helped to 'break' the cycle of hunger and encourage a return to normality.

For the rest of the Low Countries, we can be more cautious about the intensity of the contacts maintained by the towns with the most distant regions, at least in normal times, outside times of food shortages: it is clear that their hinterland was often sufficient for them, as Richard Unger suggests for part of inland Flanders. This hinterland was sometimes very rich: the best example of this is Hesbaye, which adjoined the city of Liège¹⁹ and offered a fertile belt of silty soils that largely supplied the principality's main urban centre. Here, it was the wealth of the churches and the rents held by the bourgeoisie which provided most of the needs of the town and secondary towns during 'normal' times.

The supply and intensity of inter-regional or international contacts therefore depended on geographical conditions, the existence of a solid rural hinterland and a navigable river network capable of lowering transaction costs. In less populated areas, market integration was likely to increase in times of crisis. High prices could break the usually intra-regional dynamics of grain transfers, and encourage a 'contagion' of hunger through the market. Cereals would leave the areas where prices were lowest and head for more attractive markets, as in the case of Bruges in April 1317. However, the lull in prices allowed the market to re-fragmentation, as transaction costs once again exceeded the potential profit to be made from the sale of grain.

The 'first structural inequality' in terms of access to food is therefore a 'question of location': cities located on rivers or coasts have easier access to resources, in normal times as well as in times of crisis, at least if taxation on transport was not too heavy (taxes or tariffs). Moreover, urbanisation will become increasingly dependent on access to water, and towns that are ports or located on rivers have an undeniable advantage in their development.²⁰

¹⁷ Derville, "Le grenier des Pays-Bas médiévaux;" Bigwood, "Gand et la circulation des grains;" Neveux, *Vie et déclin*; Unger, "Feeding Low Countries Towns."

¹⁸ Blockmans, Wubs-Mrozewicz, "Integration from the Seaside," 449.

¹⁹ Unger, "Maritime Transport."

²⁰ de Vries, *European Urbanization*, 158-61. These considerations on imperfect market integration do not necessarily mean that cereal markets were totally disconnected: in neighbouring regions, we often find parallel valuations that show a common awareness of the availability of cereal stocks in the region. But the phenomenon of medieval price formation mechanisms remains complex: it depends not only on supply and demand, particularly market supply and

In addition, any detailed analysis of the ease with which towns could access food must take into account variables which, unfortunately, are not available for the first half of the fourteenth century: in addition to the general level of demand, linked to soil conditions and connectivity, we need to measure, for example, the importance of aristocratic and especially ecclesiastical possessions in the countryside, institutions located in or near towns which could be repatriated to the urban market, depending on the strategies of the churches. These can be a significant source of supply. David Herlihy had roughly estimated (based on Italian records) that the land wealth of the churches represented around 33% of the distribution of land under the *Ancien Régime*.²¹ But there are in fact disparities between urban areas, and the relative proportion of supply that could be covered by this 'institutional' offer is probably variable. Bas van Bavel has also stressed the influence of the unequal distribution of property and the different operating regimes that go with it, on the future economic development of certain regions.²² Our own calculations have shown that the theoretical production of the churches located in Liège, a clerical city, should be more than sufficient to meet urban demand in normal times – even if some of this demand was undoubtedly directed towards other secondary urban markets.²³ We have no such early figures for other towns in Brabant or the Namur region. In any case, this situation is exactly similar for towns experiencing strong demographic growth, such as Flemish towns, where the development of the craft sectors has boosted demand that cannot be met by religious or secular institutions alone.

3. Cities that regulate; cities that dominate: the distortion of mechanisms for access to food

To secure food access, towns were tempted to play an economic role, the first traces of which can be found in the twelfth century. They played this role both in 'ordinary' times (to act on the structural market) and in extraordinary times (circumstantial role, particularly in the context of food crises, high prices or famine), and influenced many aspects of the grain trade.²⁴ Of all these measures, the ones that interest us most are those in which certain

demand, but also on a number of other factors that we often find difficult to analyse: public intervention in the market or agreements between players; monetary phenomena (in particular the inflationary tendencies induced by the loss of real value of minted coins); multiple interventions by players (religious; institutional) who may sell at knock-down prices or below the market price; unequal access to information on stocks and prices, between local players, and from region to region, rumours and anticipations of poor harvests to come... Measuring these mechanisms econometrically remains very complex.

²¹ Herlihy, "Church Property."

²² van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 51-93; van Bavel, "Wealth Inequality."

²³ Wilkin, "Time constraints," 319-30.

²⁴ See Devroey, "Food and Politics;" Pinto, "Food Security," and Dijkman, *Shaping Medieval Markets*. On the case of Liège, see Wilkin, "Logiques rationnelles," 16-7: a first early example

towns tried to arrogate prerogatives to themselves at the expense of others, thereby reinforcing the inequalities between consumers and merchants in different towns. This is the first level of collective action, which affects the general availability of food. The most spectacular policy in this area was the most coercive: Douai's staple right (documented only in 1396, but undoubtedly older), was an attempt to capture the grain surpluses of Artois, a highly fertile and productive region. It made Douai the preferred supplier for other areas, particularly urban Flanders. No later than the first half of the fourteenth century, the city of Ghent also imposed a staple (*Stapelrecht*) similar to that of the city of Cologne, which had been in force since 1259. These grain staple required all grain passing through the city on the River Scheldt to stop for an extended period of time, and fixed quantities of the cargo's contents to be resold on the spot (in Ghent, this ranged from one-sixth to all of the grain in transit, depending on the period; around 1350, it was half).²⁵ This coercive enterprise made Ghent the largest grain market in Flanders – an activity that compensated for the gradual loss of influence of its cloth industry, forcing people from other towns and the countryside to head for the metropolis. Any attempt to bypass the system was resisted: in the fifteenth century, attempts by Ypres to gain alternative access to grain via the Yperlee and the village of Warneton were stifled.²⁶

These well-known examples illustrate the 'second level of inequality' in access to food, this time largely forged by institutions and imposed by force and by towns whose economic, political and military power enables them to dominate the surrounding landscape and display a selfish attitude. They obviously mirror the attitudes of Italian cities seeking to project themselves beyond their walls, and dominating the *contado*. What effect does this have on consumers? The imperative of the staple certainly has disruptive effects on price formation. These have not yet been fully studied, sometimes due to a lack of data. Presumably, the coercive influx of large quantities of grain onto the cereals market guarantees fairly low prices for urban consumers. This is at least what we found for the fifteenth century, by comparing wheat and rye prices in Cologne, a staple town, and Liège, where there was no grain staple.²⁷ The former were almost always lower in the Rhine city than in the latter, at least when external events did not disrupt normal supplies (wars, weather events). The Cologne staple was the result of a proactive policy defined by the urban authorities; coupled with the city's favourable position on the Rhine, which enabled it to 'capture' commercial traffic, this resulted in consistently lower prices than in Liège, which had recourse to its very fertile hinterland

shows us the clerical city of Liège which, at the beginning of the twelfth century, took corrective measures against high prices by attempting to control – in vain – the maximum price of grain.

²⁵ Cf. Derville, "Le grenier des Pays-Bas médiévaux" and Bigwood, "Gand et la circulation des grains." For Cologne: Kuske, "Der Kölner Stapel;" Schwerhoff, "Der Kölner Stapel (1259-1831)."

²⁶ Bigwood, "Gand et la circulation des grains," 429-30.

²⁷ Bonnivert, Espeel, Wilkin, "Grain market integration."

for its ordinary supplies. The city of Liège, which would later trade with other commercial centres such as Charleville-Mézières, did not need the Meuse as its main import route for cereals, whereas the river was used to transport other commodities such as timber.

On the other hand, it is difficult to measure statistically the disadvantage incurred by secondary towns located not far from a town where a staple right exists. These small towns were ignored or bypassed by grain merchants who had to converge on towns such as Ghent or Cologne, by virtue of this staple right. The existence of a main grain market undoubtedly obliges merchants from secondary towns to go to the staple towns to obtain some supplies and then to bring back grain; the general effect of these 'detours' on the final level of the price paid in secondary locations is complex to assess: in addition to transport costs and possible transport taxes, there is the question of the influence of the general concentration of grain in the central location (the staple town) on the setting of price levels, which could thus be pushed down for local consumers, as has been suggested.

Lastly, the staple leads to other types of inequality between urban centres: it favours the city that benefits from it fiscally, by enabling it to levy taxes on trade (often on sellers and exporters, as in Douai). These additional revenues enable investment that strengthens the city's position. However, some nuances are here required: 1) while cereals may be taxed, indirect urban taxation is mostly collected on other products, such as wine and/or beer, and less on cereals. It is also unequal, since it is not levied on all city dwellers, as certain categories of the population are exempt from taxes, such as ecclesiastics.²⁸ This was another flagrant inequality in the management of transactions. 2) Local dwellers who enjoyed the legal status of burghers or *poorter* avoided the staple and taxation for the transport of their own grain, if they did not resell it in town 3) not all grain was covered by the compulsory staple.²⁹ The most prestigious of these, such as wheat, which made up the bulk of the staple, were at the heart of the system; rye, on the other hand, was also included, as it was the 'poor man's wheat'. Some types of wheats, particularly barley,³⁰ were not always targeted by the staple rights. Rye supplied the brewing sector, which

²⁸ For example: Billen, Boone, "Taxer les ecclésiastiques."

²⁹ There is analytical work to be done on this issue. Our research on Liège (Wilkin, "Time constraints") shows that legislation does not necessarily cover all products, sometimes proposing rules affecting the general interest of the urban community, or more specific interests: for example, legislation on the price of cereals and the variation in the weight of bread (see below) affects spelt (much consumed, even if the elites prefer wheat) and rye bread; wheat is not necessarily regulated. Other products, however, are the focus of attention: meat, salt and wine, for reasons that have to do both with taxation and the accessibility of these foods for the elite. Certain cereals (such as oats) are often ignored, except in times of famine. There are therefore 'legislative grey areas' that raise the question of who is really at the heart of administrative/legislative action, depending on the town and urban sociology.

³⁰ Bigwood, "Gand et la circulation des grains," 428; on rye and its consumption practices: Thoen, "Précis," 113-6. It should be noted that wheat was sometimes also available to the underprivileged. Brewers were often the victims of brewing bans in times of famine.

did not obtain that the security of supply was guaranteed by administrative constraint. According to local realities, it testifies to certain ‘choices’ in favour of the rich or of the poor, or to the lesser capacity of certain sectors to influence the legal and administrative frame.

While the staple is the most spectacular of the policies targeted, it is not the only one. Other levels of intervention can be identified and were to be found in many different locations, beyond the Low Countries, in France, England, Italy, Catalonia and Germany, among others. Again, the logic behind them is to protect urban access to food and the availability of cereals. In ordinary times, and even more so in times of famine, there is often a ban on speculative bulk buying and cross-selling, aimed at preventing speculation and protecting the consumer.³¹ However, this observation needs to be qualified: sometimes towns granted privileged status or *de facto* monopolies to professional associations of grain merchants, or to related professional associations, such as boatmen’s ones.³² These monopolies or quasi-monopolies were unfavourable to consumers. They were therefore sometimes withdrawn in emergency situations, when the grain shortage needs to be remedied, when the number of grain sellers needs to be increased,³³ and when the quantities sold need to be increased.

In some towns, the organisation of supply and resale also tends to favour certain institutional vendors, for example in Liège, where the cathedral sellers are the only ones allowed to sell in the early hours of the morning – and this privilege was formulated in 1317, after the Great Famine, when the town had experienced a major shortage of grain!³⁴ Or at certain times of the year, when the bishop – in episcopal cities – enjoys a temporary monopoly (*ban-vin*) to empty his stocks of grain or wine at times of the year when prices are high. Such measures are likely unfavourable to consumers, as they reduce the quantity of food available, while demand for grain is inelastic,³⁵ barring sudden demographic movements.

In short, we can see that urban policies that affect supply are the result of a compromise between contradictory interests. The ones of the town and of

³¹ In addition to Devroey, “Food and Politics,” we refer to a recently published book based on a doctoral thesis conducted at the University of Brussels, which summarises the arsenal of political measures adopted by the cities: Barla, *La gestion de crises*, 160-266, offers a precise typology of the interventions encountered in the fight against famine, taking the example of two cities in the Low Countries, one Flemish, the other from Hainaut.

³² In Ghent, for example, and for the conflict with Douai: Bigwood, “Gand et la circulation des grains,” 411-2.

³³ In the case of Liège, see Bonnivert’s as yet unpublished doctoral thesis, “La crosse, le glaive et le pain,” 258-9: until 1370, vendors from outside the town were forbidden access to the market without taking part. Presumably due to shortages, this provision was extended: initially limited to Saturdays, when sales by outsiders, wholesale or retail, were tolerated, from 1487 they were authorized on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. In several Flemish towns, farmers were allowed to sell their grain in specially allocated areas in the market squares, in parallel with the ordinary market.

³⁴ Wilkin, “Time constraints.”

³⁵ Zylbergeld, “Le prix des céréales.”

the prince are often of a fiscal nature.³⁶ The creation of certain major cereal markets, as obligatory resale outlets, also enhanced the economic attractiveness of the town, which in turn strengthens its other sectors of activity.³⁷ Obviously, the aim was also to guarantee the access to food of privileged groups and sometimes of the weakest ones as well – as when action is taken on the availability of rye. This was a key to political stability, as shown by Luciano Palermo for Rome and the Papal State, for example.³⁸ However, certain measures were not conducive to setting a very low price, as abovementioned temporary monopolies exemplify. Other examples are as follows: several regulations enhanced inequality between consumers and favour privileged groups. In Liège, a city with a clerical sociology, the clerics of the churches were able to buy before everyone else; or in many, if not all, localities, the city's 'bourgeoisie' enjoyed a concrete legal status and had priority access to cereals and meat at the start of the day on market days. This was the case for the *poorters* of Ghent, for example,³⁹ or for the *cives* of Liège, a category that is legally ill-defined in the earliest documents that provide information on it, but which probably refers to the elite. It was later in the day that other categories gained access to the market: non-burghers, often the poorest; but also foreigners, who could buy for their own consumption; and finally, merchants who re-exported goods, often in limited quantities, and who were the object of great mistrust.

We will be quicker to point out other measures, which in principle protect consumers as a whole: for example, the system whereby the weight of bread varies according to the price of grain, which guarantees a façade of price stability⁴⁰ (but makes market fluctuations and their concrete effects very visible). It was sometimes replaced later by a system that varies the price of the bread, but keeps the weight fixed. There have also been sporadic attempts to control prices (in times of crisis, often to no avail), and even some massive purchases and sales at knock-down prices by the urban community, which are fairly rare in the North, which rarely had 'public granaries'.⁴¹ Lastly, there were provisions to regulate the quality of grain sold or flour; and almost everywhere, control was applied to capacity measurements and fraud prevention.

³⁶ The taxation of cereals did not generally form the core of the tax base – it was rather the taxation of wine or beer, which were also made from cereals, that brought in the most revenue. But the cities, be they Ghent, Liège or Cologne, value their position as merchants in the grain trade. The attractiveness of urban centres as trading centres for cereals also has a direct effect on general economic activity.

³⁷ Palermo, "Politiche dell'alimentazione."

³⁸ Palermo, *Mercati del grano*.

³⁹ Wilkin, "Time constraints," 323-5; Bigwood, "Gand et la circulation des grains," 439-40.

⁴⁰ The origin of this legislation can be found as far back as the Carolingian period, when the weight of bread depended on current prices, but the price remained fixed: Devroey, *La nature et le roi*, 372. See: Zylbergeld, "Le prix des céréales," 271-2, 275 and appendix II, A and B, 775; 778-85 for an example of legislation in the Liège region. For the modern period, see the important book by de Vries, *The Price of Bread*.

⁴¹ For example, Barla, *La gestion de crises*, 182-97.

The layering and subtle mix of considerations therefore explain the existence of multiple inequalities in access to the market, for sellers and consumers alike, and which hit rural or out-of-town residents even harder, as they had second-hand access to the urban market, while certain groups of urban sellers and buyers enjoyed priority and guaranteed access to it. The provisions therefore sometimes benefit the sellers, sometimes the favoured consumers, or create a balance that tends towards one or the other, according to the context.

4. *The context of the fourteenth century and regulatory activity*

The final question that concerns us here is that of the temporal evolution of these provisions, their link with the socio-economic context of the pre-1400s, and the possible impact of the Great Famine or the Plague on their adoption. It is obviously tricky to draw 'causal' conclusions from the concomitance of phenomena. Although there are direct or indirect indications of regulatory activity in the twelfth century, the first urban economic legislation most often appears in the sources around 1250 or even later. 1250 was the time when the variability of the weight of bread, in Liège or Ypres, was linked to the price of grain and when interpretative grids (price of grain vs. weight of bread) became necessary: but these measures date back at least to a Carolingian background, as has already been pointed out! And the thirteenth century was not characterized by any major food crises, although we can assume that there was some pressure around 1250.⁴²

Around 1300, the economic situation is that of a 'full' world, in which Malthusian tensions between resources and populations were at their highest, and where any accident affecting the quantity of food produced ('food availability decline', in Sen's terminology) could create tensions. Precisely, urban legislation became more extensive and detailed between 1300 and 1350. However, this period also marked the consecration of the urban autonomy in the Low Countries. So, we can just as easily defend the idea that the development of new regulation was the result of a growing legislative effort, linked to the more systematic use of the written word.

In fact, the two phenomena are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, we can go beyond this alternative by pointing out that, in any case, the management of supplies was one of the key areas in which the new urban communities were active.⁴³ Even during the plague in Tournai, the town regulation bear witness

⁴² Barla, "Pour la necessitet du povre peuple," 95; Zylbergeld, "Le prix des céréales;" Zylbergeld, "Les régulations du marché;" Zylbergeld, "Contribution," *passim* and in particular 269-70. English examples in Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, 233-41.

⁴³ An interesting breakdown of the nature of the provisions adopted in urban legislation in Clauzel *et al.*, "L'activité législative," by centuries, sometimes very early when possible (as in Douai, where the importance of provisions relating to the food trade is great).

to sustained administrative activity in economic matters, and in particular food issues, which went beyond those relating to health issues.⁴⁴ Economic control gave the town a large part of its legitimacy.

A number of major urban 'laws' can undoubtedly be linked to the context of food tension, famine and high prices: in 1317, the major regulations governing the food trade in Liège came in the wake of the great famine of 1315-7. However, the regulations were not uniformly favourable to consumers and confirmed the dominant position of the clergy in the food market. Ghent's legislation appeared in the texts between 1337 and 1366; while Bigwood noted that the first provisions on the staple were explicit around 28 April 1350, its first mention may already have appeared around 1323, and its definitive organisation crystallized between 1358 and 1364. These texts were therefore drawn up in a context in which several major charters were to take effect. Flanders experienced four major food crises in the fourteenth century: in descending order of importance, in 1315-7; in 1339 to 1342 (especially in southern Flanders); in 1360-1; and finally, before and after the Black Death, in 1349-51.⁴⁵

5. Conclusions

Medieval urban market was 'segmented' according to several lines which organized the access of buyers and sellers. The leverages of its organization were primarily spatial lines, with a multiplicity of different places of exchange allocated to the sale of certain products: meat, fish, cereals, fruit or vegetables, etc. The organisation of the market could also be reinforced by a play on 'temporality' as a way to regulate access by applying differentiated rhythms of access to selling and buying. To go further in the efficiency and fairness of this organization, it would be necessary to carry out a detailed analysis, on a case-by-case basis, of the contexts in which the regulations emerged, the specific sociologies of each of the cities and the bodies that control and issue the legislation, linking these observations with the local context, which is not possible within the tight framework of this article. Drawing absolute conclusions on the nature of these urban regulations is undoubtedly premature, as they would need to be subjected to a large-scale comparative study embracing the cities of the Netherlands, following the example of what is underway for Southern France and Italy.⁴⁶ The differences in logic encountered, which result in certain provisions or texts benefiting different social groups or individuals, are the result of several factors. power relations between social groups, and the stranglehold of certain sectors on the administrative process,

⁴⁴ Billen, Boone, *Bans and Edits*, 21-5 and 35.

⁴⁵ Espeel, "Prices and crises," 114-41.

⁴⁶ See the publications of the research program on Mediterranean communal statutes coordinated by Didier Lett, currently underway.

first and foremost. Sometimes the contradictions reflect a complicated genesis: certain decisions were initially adopted on an (often weekly) *ad hoc* basis (as in Tournai),⁴⁷ to resolve a specific and very peculiar situation. But the specific can form the basis for more perennial legislation of broader interest. In this way, singular decisions have accumulated over time. In other cases, urban statutes and by-laws are the product of a genuine, well-considered codification, or a complete overhaul of previous regulations (as in Soignies). A true typological study of urban bylaws should therefore be undertaken, as the genesis of these bylaws could perhaps help to explain certain inconsistencies.

We also need to broaden the scope of our analysis: 1) firstly, by looking at the economic efficiency of the policies implemented in towns, which is the subject of much debate. In some cases, voluntarism, even selfish voluntarism, pays off: it has been pointed out that Cologne's position and staple had brought benefits to the local inhabitants in terms of low prices, in particular. But what level of control was actually applied on a daily basis to prevent cheating? We refer to James Davis' pessimistic assessment, for example, of the punishment for fraud.⁴⁸ This is difficult to substantiate for our regions, given the lack of judicial sources prior to the modern era.

2) In the case of market inequalities, the question of market segmentation, already raised by historiography,⁴⁹ needs to be stressed. Markets were spatially and temporally segmented, as pointed above. But the existence of quality standards and strict regulation provided a normative framework that could nonetheless be reconciled with the legitimate existence of a market for products of lesser quality or not even new. According to the mentality of the authors of regulation, it was important to avoid confusion between new products or those of more prestigious status, and the 'altered' or second-hand goods. It brought another level of segmentation, between first-quality and new items, and 'secondary quality' or second-hand products (outside the food sector: second-hand goods, especially clothes, or metal).⁵⁰ Even in the case of food, there were markets for these products of lesser quality, as in Mons, where mediocre, less noble or older meats were sold to the underprivileged, in a place physically separated from the "first-rate butcher"⁵¹ by a distance of at least 12 metres. The existence of certain foodstuffs that are invisible in official market regulations also raises the question of a segmented market. Some cereals, 'less central' or prestigious, sometimes appear in the regulations or

⁴⁷ Billen, Boone, *Bans and Edits*, passim, with also some preliminary reflections on the genesis of the urban regulation.

⁴⁸ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, 269-70; 455-7 shows the complexity of the arrangements between moral imperatives, and the fluctuating and flexible practices that oscillate between the interests of the protagonists.

⁴⁹ To repeat the typology of Petrowiste, "Consommateurs."

⁵⁰ Cf. the chapter of Todeschini.

⁵¹ Cf. Devillers, *Bans de police de la ville de Mons*, 20: these are not dated (between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries), but the writing refers to the thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

disappear from them, depending on the context. Not all commodities were regulated with the same vigour: the most prestigious were almost always: wheat or spelt, depending on the relative importance that these cereals might have in terms of local 'food cultures'.⁵² Some products with a more modest status, but which are sometimes socially very important, are also mentioned, such as rye, which in Ghent is one of the two products of the staple. Barley is less frequently mentioned (although it receives a great deal of attention in the small town of Sint-Truiden, where the brewing of beer is an essential economic and fiscal issue),⁵³ and oats are very often ignored, as they are often used for animals, but also to make bread for the poorest people or during famine.⁵⁴ Depending on the case, many other products or cereals fall outside the regulated categories,⁵⁵ such as millet and einkorn... This is also the case for peas and vegetables.

Market segmentation is especially embodied in the contrasts between the formal markets officially regulated and the informal markets, those that exist on the periphery of the market governed by a normative framework: they are central to any consideration of equal access to the market. By its very nature, informal market is almost invisible, or at any rate less controllable.⁵⁶ There are indeed different types of activities, which straddle the two types of market, and are more or less legitimate and supervised. The activity of peddlers is more easily identifiable in the Early Modern sources; they sell in the city but also on its outskirts; the selling in shops is tolerated but less appreciated by the authorities, because it is less easy to monitor, by definition. Selling even occurs in places where other activities were normally centralized (e.g. inns, where meals and accommodation were provided), but where sometimes products (wine, grain, meat) were traded outside the control circuits. Inns also acted as meeting places for merchants, which made it possible to conduct transactions. Illicit and fraudulent activity took also place in private homes or in the immediate suburbs. 'Regraters' who bought goods outside the market, often outside the town, and then speculated on their resale inside or outside the walls were also systematically targeted by regulations. All of these

⁵² Spelt is not necessarily a 'second-class' cereal, as is sometimes written. On this subject, for the period we are dealing with here: Genicot, "La limite."

⁵³ For example, in Straven, *Inventaire*, 214.

⁵⁴ Cf. Wilkin, "Famine et paupérisation," 238: in 1124, Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, had oat bread made. It was still used to feed certain populations until the end of the *Ancien Régime*.

⁵⁵ Even more so in times of famine. Despite the probable rush to more modest types of wheat in times of famine, which served as substitute foods, very little is known about the circulation of more modest cereals (einkorn, millet, buckwheat and even spelt, which had a more complex status, depending on the place and time): their price was not always regulated and organized. And in times of famine, are they given to the poorest, or traded? Not to mention the destination of certain products, such as barley, which was brewed or fed to animals... but not always. I owe these comments to Mathieu Arnoux, whom I would like to thank.

⁵⁶ On this subject, see: Nigro, *Il commercio al minuto*; Blondé et al., *Buyers and sellers*. In general, see many contributions in Davis, *A Cultural History*.

activities are more or less on the edge of prohibition, although they are not always strictly illegal. In the symbolic hierarchy of activities, they were the least liked. However, according to historians, they may well have been among the most frequented. There would therefore have been two parallel market systems: a 'public' market, taxed and controlled, which guaranteed constant and fair access to food and served as public insurance for subsistence; and an informal market, which eluded historians and archaeologists until proven otherwise, which took place in many interstitial places. By definition, the existence of a market that exists alongside the formalized market, in a more or less socially accepted way, creates disparities and inequalities between those who play the game and those who bypass it.⁵⁷

3) We need to think beyond the market and reintroduce into the analysis the question of inequality in its most common sense, and thus integrate debates on the evolution of living standards/real wages, before and after the famine and the plague.⁵⁸ The sources often contain only the isolated wages of day labourers or wage earners, paid by the day or by the task, with no statistics on individual unemployment levels and annual occupation rates; and indirect considerations on the ability of wage earners to negotiate in order to increase the value of their work, as in the chronicles. The question of the effect of immigration to the town and its corrective effect on the demographic decline 'within the town' is crucial: because immigration makes it possible to compensate for the demographic decline in the urban workforce, and therefore prevents real wages from rising. And above all, because the question of compensatory labour, particularly for women, for example in agriculture, has a debated impact on male and female wage levels, in England as in the Netherlands.⁵⁹ In short, the crisis is not necessarily improving the situation of the weakest workers, or their access to food. It should also be noted that the level of women's real wages for less-skilled workers may have been higher in northern Europe (a.o. in Antwerp), even if the trend would have been less positive after 1500, and thus that they had there a better access to the food market.⁶⁰

4) Finally, non-market and individual food allowances (other types of 'entitlements') often escape analysis. There are many possible levels of reflection here: food distributions to the poor – which we believe, in the Low Countries, to be relatively marginal in relation to the scale of poverty⁶¹ – need to

⁵⁷ Cf. the chapter of Todeschini.

⁵⁸ On this question, in general, see: Sosson *et al.*, *Les niveaux de vie au Moyen Âge*. The problem has not really been taken up again for the Low Countries. Interesting case study in: Espeel, Geens, "Feeding inequalities," 403-10.

⁵⁹ Munro, "Wage-Stickiness, Monetary Changes." On women's work, see lastly: Vervaeke, "Women and Wage Labour," 204, footnotes 2 to 5, with reference to the relevant literature on the fourteenth century context. On the effects of the plague, wage levels and competitive or non-competitive advantages for certain less affected regions, see: Blockmans, "The social and economic effects of plague;" Cohn, "After the Black Death."

⁶⁰ De Pleijt, van Zanden, "Gender wage inequality."

⁶¹ This is another subject to be revisited. For England, see: Dyer, "Did the rich really help the poor?"

be measured at their true value. The self-consumption of annuities paid in kind to the town inhabitants, who bought themselves a form of security, is another factor that needs to be clarified, even if they were able to sell them on the market. For the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, it has been estimated that between 20% and 40% of peri-urban or rural land was owned by the burghers of the towns,⁶² a phenomenon also documented in the city of Cologne, for example.⁶³ Hospital annuities were often used to provide the bourgeoisie with a form of food security in their old age.⁶⁴ Lastly, other types of non-market access to food (domesticity, dependence on churches, access to intra – or peri-urban communal resources) should also be taken into account.

In short, these are all spheres of the economy whose importance cannot be denied in terms of access to food security, and which escape any analysis that focuses on the market. Here again, there must be many variations from one area to another, depending on the intrinsic characteristics of each town (sector of activity; institutions present, and their relationship with redistribution and economic paternalism; geography and nature of the relationship between the town and its immediate rural surroundings). The analysis of inequalities in access to food is therefore a complex undertaking that requires a broad view, not exclusively dependent on a focus on the market which, in the *Ancien Régime*, was an important but not the only means of access to subsistence.

⁶² See: van Bavel, van Cruyningen, Thoen, "The Low-Countries, 1000-1750," 174.

⁶³ Irsigler, "Getreidepreise," 581-2.

⁶⁴ See in particular: Pauly, *Peregrinorum, pauperum*.

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Mobilità sociale, ricambio politico e disuguaglianza economica a Firenze nei primi decenni del Trecento. Qualche spunto di riflessione

di Alma Poloni

L'articolo utilizza i dati sulla partecipazione al priorato nel Trecento per cercare di analizzare il cambiamento nel tempo dell'intensità e delle caratteristiche dei processi di mobilità sociale a Firenze. Si tratta di un piccolo esperimento che prova ad aggirare il problema rappresentato dalla difficoltà di misurare la mobilità sociale nei contesti storici per i quali non disponiamo dei dati statistici ai quali fanno riferimento i sociologi quando studiano questo fenomeno per le società contemporanee. In mancanza di ogni tentativo di misurazione, infatti, quello di mobilità rischia di rimanere un concetto troppo vago, poco efficace come strumento interpretativo per la comprensione delle dinamiche sociali e del loro mutamento. L'ultimo paragrafo si soffermerà brevemente sulla questione ancora più complessa del rapporto tra mobilità sociale e disuguaglianza economica.

This article uses data on participation in the priorate in the fourteenth century to analyze the change over time in the intensity and nature of the processes of social mobility in Florence. It is a small experiment that attempts to circumvent the problem posed by the difficulty of measuring social mobility in historical contexts for which we do not have the statistical data that sociologists use to study this phenomenon in contemporary societies. Indeed, in the absence of any attempt at measurement, the concept of mobility runs the risk of remaining too vague and ineffective as an interpretive tool for understanding social dynamics and their change. The final section briefly addresses the even more complex issue of the relationship between social mobility and economic inequality.

Medioevo, Trecento, Firenze, priorato, classe media, mobilità sociale.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Florence, priorate, middle class, social mobility.

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Sul tema della mobilità sociale nel pieno e tardo medioevo la storiografia italiana ha fatto enormi progressi negli ultimi anni; si può dire anzi che su questo argomento essa sia all'avanguardia nel panorama storiografico internazionale.¹ Proprio il moltiplicarsi degli studi, tuttavia, ha fatto emergere a mio parere un problema oggettivo: come si può misurare la mobilità sociale per epoche per le quali non disponiamo dei dati statistici ai quali fanno riferimento i sociologi quando studiano questo fenomeno per le società contemporanee? In mancanza di ogni tentativo di misurazione diventa molto difficile analizzare il cambiamento nel tempo dell'intensità e delle caratteristiche dei processi di mobilità sociale, l'aspetto davvero rilevante per uno storico. In altre parole, il concetto di mobilità perde buona parte della sua efficacia come strumento interpretativo per la comprensione delle dinamiche sociali e del loro mutamento.

Questo articolo non pretende certo di trovare una soluzione a questo problema, ammesso che una soluzione esista. Esso rappresenta piuttosto un piccolo esperimento, il tentativo di utilizzare quel 'poco' che abbiamo, le informazioni che ci vengono fornite dalle tipologie di fonti che più di frequente sono giunte fino a noi, per cercare di dare maggiore consistenza all'analisi diacronica della mobilità sociale. Il saggio si concentra sul Trecento, con particolare attenzione, in linea con il tema del volume, alla prima metà del secolo. La scelta del caso fiorentino è legata prima di tutto alla stessa ragione che potrebbe, in apparenza, renderlo meno interessante, ovvero l'intensa attenzione storiografica della quale è stato ed è oggetto, che ha prodotto una conoscenza assai approfondita di molti aspetti della storia economica, sociale e politica della città.² Essa mi è sembrata una base solida e rassicurante per avventurarmi nel mio esperimento; ho pensato, in altre parole, che solo padroneggiando già molto bene il quadro in tutte le sue linee essenziali fosse possibile individuare le sfumature, gli scarti, gli snodi, aggiungere cioè ulteriore complessità. Questo, infatti, è lo scopo dell'articolo, non certo dire qualcosa di radicalmente nuovo. La seconda ragione è la disponibilità di uno strumento preziosissimo, il *database on line* delle *Tratte*, che consente di conoscere i nomi dei fiorentini che sedettero non solo nel priorato, ma anche nei due collegi consultivi dei dodici e dei gonfalonieri delle società del popolo.³

¹ Mi limito a citare alcuni volumi collettivi particolarmente significativi: Carocci, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Tanzini, Tognetti, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Gamberini, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Carocci, De Vincentiis, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Collavini, Petralia, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Carbonetti Vendittelli, Vendittelli, *Mobilità sociale nel medioevo*; Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social Mobility*.

² Per ragioni di spazio, e in considerazione della mole degli studi disponibili, i riferimenti bibliografici saranno limitati ai lavori strettamente pertinenti al discorso sviluppato in queste pagine, e alle opere più recenti che discutono la storiografia precedente.

³ Herlihy et al. *Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532*. <https://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/tratte/main.html>. Sulle caratteristiche e le funzioni del priorato e degli altri due collegi di vertice Gualtieri, *Il comune di Firenze*, 173-221.

Gran parte del saggio prenderà in considerazione i processi di mobilità sociale nella Firenze del Trecento. Il paragrafo finale, invece, si soffermerà brevemente su una questione ancora più complicata, la disuguaglianza economica, e più specificamente il rapporto tra mobilità sociale e disuguaglianza economica. I risultati di questa piccola indagine sono ipotetici e provvisori; spero comunque di fornire almeno qualche spunto di riflessione, in una fase nella quale gli studi sulla mobilità sociale cominciano già a manifestare, come forse è normale, una certa stanchezza.

1. Questioni metodologiche

A livello individuale, si ha mobilità sociale quando il figlio approda a una posizione sociale migliore (mobilità ascendente) o peggiore (mobilità discendente) rispetto al padre. Quando lo spostamento nello spazio sociale riguarda un numero elevato di individui si può parlare di mobilità collettiva, o di gruppo, che è un fenomeno non molto considerato dai sociologi, ma molto rilevante per gli storici, perché è in genere il riflesso di importanti cambiamenti economici, sociali e/o culturali. Dietro l'apparente semplicità di questa descrizione si nascondono tuttavia problemi di grande complessità, il principale dei quali è senza dubbio una definizione non solo impressionistica di 'posizione sociale.' Cosa determina la posizione sociale di un individuo? Il reddito, la ricchezza, i consumi, lo stile di vita, l'educazione, la considerazione sociale? E inoltre, su quali basi una posizione sociale è considerabile 'migliore' o 'più elevata' rispetto a un'altra? Per non rimanere nella genericità è insomma necessario per prima cosa individuare diverse classi sociali, dotate di precise caratteristiche distintive e confini distinguibili, se non proprio netti, e in seguito collocarle in un ordine gerarchico, indispensabile per rappresentare i cambiamenti nello status sociale di un individuo come spostamenti verso 'l'alto' o verso 'il basso'. Si tratta di un'operazione tutt'altro che banale, persino per le società contemporanee. I sociologi ricorrono in genere all'individuazione di macro-categorie occupazionali, partendo dal presupposto che la professione svolta determini in maniera significativa – anche se, chiaramente, non esclusiva – il reddito, e quindi la capacità di spesa e lo stile di vita, ma anche la posizione e la reputazione sociale, nonché la percezione di sé.⁴ Sulla base di queste classi occupazionali definiscono poi una gerarchia sociale. Gli economisti preferiscono invece in genere ragionare per classi di reddito, che rendono immediatamente percepibile chi 'sta meglio' e chi 'sta peggio', ma non tengono conto di molti altri aspetti dello status sociale di una persona.

Per chi studia le società preindustriali le difficoltà sono ancora maggiori, per la mancanza di quei dati statistici che per le società contemporanee per-

⁴ Per una riflessione sugli stimoli che possono venire dalla sociologia per lo studio della mobilità sociale nelle città medievali rimando a Poloni, "Mobilità sociale dopo la peste."

mettono, scegliendo uno dei criteri possibili, di definire una stratificazione sociale. Le fonti fiscali in teoria consentono di individuare diverse classi di ricchezza e dunque studiare la mobilità economica intergenerazionale (che in ogni caso, come si è detto, non corrisponde sic et simpliciter alla mobilità sociale). Tuttavia, sono pochissime le realtà medievali per le quali, prima almeno della metà del Trecento, disponiamo di rilevazioni fiscali complete e ripetute nel tempo; Firenze, peraltro, non rientra tra queste fortunate eccezioni. Gli storici hanno quindi usato altri indicatori, più ‘qualitativi’, per tracciare il passaggio di un individuo a una posizione sociale migliore rispetto a quella del padre; uno dei più utilizzati, per le città comunali, è l’accesso alle cariche politiche di vertice.⁵ Di fatto, la mobilità sociale è stata quindi studiata principalmente sotto forma di ricambio politico. Questa operazione è favorita dal fatto che, se non altro, per un certo numero di città disponiamo di elenchi anche relativamente completi di persone che hanno preso parte ai collegi esecutivi, priori, anziani e simili.

Considerando più specificatamente Firenze nel Trecento, è metodologicamente accettabile leggere l’ingresso nel priorato di un individuo appartenente a una famiglia che non vi aveva mai avuto accesso in precedenza come una manifestazione di mobilità sociale? Ci sono, mi pare, buone ragioni per sostenerlo. I meccanismi di selezione dei priori cambiano nei particolari nel corso del secolo, ma si basano sempre, come è noto, sulla cooptazione.⁶ A partire dal 1328 si affermò definitivamente un sistema in tre fasi. La prima consisteva nella preparazione di liste di nomi da parte di commissioni elettorali più o meno ampie e rappresentative a seconda dell’orientamento politico del momento. La seconda, il cosiddetto scrutinio, prevedeva che ciascun nome fosse sottoposto a votazione da parte di un’altra commissione in genere più ristretta; anche in questo caso il livello di rappresentanza delle diverse componenti politico-sociali variò nel corso del tempo. I nomi che ottenevano almeno i due terzi dei voti, in numero sufficiente a comporre diversi collegi bimestrali, venivano inseriti in appositi contenitori ed estratti a sorte qualche giorno prima dell’inizio del nuovo mandato, in quella che era la terza e ultima fase del processo. La possibilità di essere nominati, e soprattutto di superare lo scrutinio, che rappresentava la vera selezione, cresceva quindi con l’aumentare della propria visibilità sociale, che derivava da una complessa combinazione di successo economico, reputazione personale e, alla lunga, familiare, inserimento nella ‘giusta’ rete di relazioni. Una sola partecipazione al priorato non è particolarmente indicativa. Ma possiamo dare per assodato che, per un uomo i cui ascendenti non abbiano mai avuto accesso al collegio, ricoprire più volte la carica nel corso della propria esistenza e riuscire a trasmettere questo

⁵ Mi limito a pochi esempi per le città toscane: per Firenze Raveggi *et al.*, *Ghibellini, guelfi; Diacciati, Popolani e magnati*; per Pisa: Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società*; per Lucca: Poloni, *Lucca nel Duecento*; per Siena, ora: Giacchetto, *Siena città manifatturiera*.

⁶ Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*.

diritto anche ai figli e ai discendenti sia il segnale di un percorso di mobilità sociale coronato da successo.

In linea con l'impostazione del volume, questo articolo concentra la propria attenzione sulla prima metà del Trecento. Tuttavia, i tratti distintivi di questa fase, se ce ne sono, possono essere apprezzati soltanto attraverso un confronto con altri periodi caratterizzati da diverse congiunture economiche e politiche. Ho provato quindi ad analizzare la composizione del priorato in tre momenti diversi, tre intervalli di sei anni ciascuno: dal 1330 al 1335 compresi – quando era già operativa, quindi, la legge elettorale del 1328, che definì nelle sue linee essenziali il meccanismo che rimase in vigore anche in seguito –, dal 1345 al 1350 – periodo che abbraccia il regime degli 'uomini nuovi' che governò la città tra il 1343 e il 1348, ma anche i mesi immediatamente successivi al grande sconvolgimento rappresentato dalla peste – e dal 1370 al 1375, gli anni precedenti al tumulto dei Ciompi. L'indagine, come accennato, si fonda sull'utilizzo del database on line delle *Tratte*. Inutile sottolineare che esistono già ottime ricerche di questo tipo, che peraltro prendono in considerazione periodi più lunghi e sono dunque molto più complete.⁷ La mia prospettiva è tuttavia leggermente diversa: vorrei tentare di capire, nello specifico, fino a che punto e in che modo i cambiamenti nella composizione del priorato sono il riflesso di mutamenti nel ritmo e nelle caratteristiche della mobilità sociale. Per me è stato quindi importante sottoporre i dati a una nuova analisi alla ricerca di indicatori che potevano non aver attirato l'attenzione di studiosi mossi da interrogativi differenti. Un indicatore che, dopo la schedatura, mi è sembrato particolarmente rilevante è, come si vedrà, la diversa presenza nel priorato, nei tre intervalli di tempo, di persone prive di cognome, e di nomi accompagnati dall'indicazione di professione.

2. Fisionomia del priorato fiorentino nel Trecento

La Tabella 1 riporta alcune informazioni sulla distribuzione dei seggi. Negli anni Trenta del Trecento i priori erano ancora sei, più un gonfaloniere di giustizia, per ogni collegio bimestrale. Dal 1343, con la riforma delle ripartizioni territoriali della città e il passaggio dai sestii ai quartieri, il numero dei priori fu portato a otto per ogni collegio, al quale si aggiungeva sempre il gonfaloniere di giustizia.

⁷ Soprattutto Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, che discute ampiamente gli studi precedenti.

Tabella 1. *Distribuzione dei seggi dei priori a Firenze (1330-75)*

Anni	Seggi disponibili	Numero di persone estratte	Priorati per persona
1330-5	252	204	1,2
1345-50	324	324	1
1370-5	324	300	1,08

Fonte: *Online Treats of Office Holders, 1282-1532*: version 1.1, machine readable data file. Providence (RI): Brown University, 2002. <https://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/treats/main.html>.

Come si può notare, di fatto nel periodo 1345-50 nessun fiorentino ricoprì la carica di priore per più di una volta, una circostanza del tutto in linea con il carattere di particolare apertura che la storiografia ha individuato come tratto distintivo di questa fase.⁸ Ma anche per gli anni 1330-5 il tasso di concentrazione risulta tutto sommato basso, perlomeno a livello individuale. Parzialmente diverse, come si vedrà tra poco, sono le conclusioni che si possono trarre se si prendono in considerazione le famiglie invece degli individui.

Nella Tabella 2 sono invece riportate le percentuali, nei tre intervalli di tempo, di priori per i quali non è registrato un cognome, identificati quindi solo attraverso il nome e il patronimico, e quelle di individui accompagnati dall'indicazione di professione. Come si può notare, la differenza tra gli anni 1330-5 e le fasi successive è radicale. Peraltro, se ci si sofferma nello specifico sull'identità degli appena tredici priori con indicazione di professione, si tratta in ben dieci casi di giurisperiti, ai quali si aggiungono due medici e un isolato rigattiere.

Tabella 2. *Distribuzione dei seggi dei priori a Firenze (1330-75): eletti privi di cognome e identificati dalla professione*

Anni	Priori privi di cognome	Priori identificati dalla professione
1330-5	15% (15)	6,7% (13)
1345-50	44,4% (144)	39,5% (128)
1370-5	27,3% (83)	34% (102)

Fonte: vedi Tabella 1.

È bene specificare che a Firenze l'uso del cognome è tutt'altro che sistematico. Non è affatto inusuale che anche i membri di casate di rilievo compaiano, persino nella documentazione pubblica, solo con nome e patronimico, o con nome, patronimico e nome del nonno.⁹ L'eccezione, tuttavia, è rappresentata proprio dagli elenchi dei priori, caratterizzati da un'attenzione assai puntigliosa ai nomi di famiglia. In casi piuttosto numerosi, anzi, ho potuto verificare che lo stesso individuo, soprattutto se appartenente a una famiglia non

⁸ Analogamente, Najemy osserva che tra il novembre 1343 e l'agosto 1348 i 265 posti disponibili furono ricoperti da 265 persone: Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 151. Su questa fase si veda anche Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 105-47, Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 132-44, e ora Tanzini, *1345: la bancarotta*, ottima sintesi critica della storiografia precedente.

⁹ Si vedano i casi riportati alle note e il testo corrispondente

di primissimo rango, compare tra i dodici e i gonfalonieri solo con nome e patronimico, e tra i priori sempre con il cognome. L'esigenza pratica di individuare con certezza i membri di uno stesso gruppo familiare per l'applicazione dei 'divieti', sui quali si tornerà più avanti, non può quindi essere considerata la motivazione principale di questa attenzione: i 'divieti' esistevano anche per gli altri due collegi. È dunque possibile che fossero proprio il prestigio della carica, e l'importanza della presenza nel priorato per la definizione dello status sociale di una famiglia e la costruzione della memoria familiare, le ragioni della registrazione rigorosa dei cognomi. Ovviamente, esistono casi nei quali non è facile capire se ci si trova di fronte a un vero cognome stabilizzato o a un altro elemento onomastico, un patronimico o il nome del nonno. I curatori del database spiegano che nei casi dubbi hanno applicato un principio di cautela, non considerando l'elemento onomastico incerto un cognome.¹⁰ Ciò dovrebbe portare a una sottostima, non certo a una sovrastima del numero di persone identificate da un cognome. Peraltro, Anthony Molho ha dimostrato che a partire dalla metà del Trecento l'uso del cognome si diffuse notevolmente nella società fiorentina.¹¹ Ci aspetteremmo quindi per gli anni Settanta un numero di individui privi di un nome di famiglia inferiore rispetto agli anni Trenta.

Prima di andare un po' più in profondità su questo aspetto, è opportuno affrontare la questione del tasso di concentrazione familiare del potere. La Tabella 3 confronta, prendendo in considerazione esclusivamente i priori per i quali è indicato il cognome, una serie di indicatori che mi sembrano significativi in questo senso, in particolare, il numero medio di priorati per famiglia – un'astrazione matematica, ma comunque suggestiva –, la percentuale di famiglie che ricoprono un solo priorato nell'intervallo considerato, e il numero massimo di seggi priorali occupati da una sola famiglia nello stesso intervallo.

Tabella 3. *Distribuzione dei seggi dei priori a Firenze (1330-75): famiglie identificate dal cognome*

Anni	Priorati per famiglia	Famiglie con un solo priorato	Numero massimo di priorati per famiglia
1330-5	1,7	62%	6 (Rucellai, Strozzi)
1345-50	1,3	78,7%	5 (Albizzi)
1370-5	1,4	74,7%	4 (Bucelli, Strozzi)

Fonte: vedi Tabella 1.

Una maggiore dispersione delle cariche tra un numero elevato di famiglie, o se vogliamo una diminuzione del tasso di concentrazione familiare dell'accesso al priorato, sono dunque tendenze piuttosto evidenti – e del resto note

¹⁰ *A Note on Names*, in Herlihy *et al.*, *Florentine Renaissance*. <https://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/tratte/doc/NN-Names.html>.

¹¹ Molho, "Names, Memory."

alla storiografia –, che si affermano con il governo degli ‘uomini nuovi’ del 1343-8 ma in realtà persistono nei decenni successivi.¹² Il confronto con altre realtà contemporanee, per esempio la vicina Pisa, mostra tuttavia che anche nei primi anni Trenta del Trecento la concentrazione del potere a Firenze non è in effetti così eclatante.¹³ La presenza delle maggiori famiglie dell’élite popolare nell’anzianato pisano è assai più invadente che nel priorato fiorentino. Il numero medio di anziani per famiglia è 2,6.¹⁴ Mentre nessuna casata fiorentina superò le sei partecipazioni nell’intervallo 1330-5, negli stessi anni a Pisa i Gatti e gli Scacceri occuparono l’anzianato per otto volte, gli Alliata, i da Campiglia e i Delle Brache per nove volte, gli Scarso per dieci e i Bonconti per undici.¹⁵ Tra il 1300 e il 1340 gli Strozzi, la famiglia fiorentina che contò più priorati, ne totalizzarono 35. Nello stesso arco di tempo, a Pisa i Bonconti sedettero nell’anzianato per 72 volte! Negli anni Trenta del Trecento, certo, Pisa era soggetta alla signoria dei Donoratico.¹⁶ Si trattava, tuttavia, di un esempio particolarmente trasparente di ‘signoria di popolo’, nella quale l’anzianato manteneva la sua centralità politica.¹⁷ Nel periodo compreso tra il 1288 e il 1314, quando Pisa non fu sottoposta ad alcun regime signorile, la concentrazione familiare del potere era in realtà ancora maggiore.¹⁸

Un aspetto che mi ha un po’ stupito è che, mentre per gli intervalli 1345-50 e 1370-75 la mia indagine ha prodotto risultati del tutto compatibili con quelli discussi da John Najemy, per il 1330-5 emerge un livello di concentrazione familiare del potere assai più contenuto rispetto a quello indicato dallo studioso americano sulla base di un’analisi condotta sui priori degli anni compresi tra la fine del 1328 e l’estate del 1342: egli calcola infatti una media di ben 2,8 priorati per famiglia.¹⁹ Il ‘mio’ priorato, insomma, appare molto meno oligarchico del ‘suo’. Al momento non so spiegare questa differenza, ma un’ipotesi plausibile potrebbe essere che la seconda metà degli anni Trenta e i primi anni Quaranta, caratterizzati da una grave crisi economica e finanziaria e da drammatiche pressioni esterne, abbiano visto l’élite serrare i propri ranghi, intensificare il proprio impegno politico e prendere più saldamente nelle proprie mani le redini della politica cittadina.²⁰

È importante comunque sottolineare che a Pisa non esistevano ‘divieti’ applicati al gruppo familiare, a parte la proibizione per i membri della stessa famiglia di far parte dello stesso collegio anzianale.²¹ A Firenze negli anni

¹² Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 149-51, 195-202.

¹³ Su questa fase della vita politica pisana Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società*.

¹⁴ Dati tratti da *Breve Vetus*.

¹⁵ Su queste famiglie Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società, ad indicem*.

¹⁶ Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società*, 275-375, e soprattutto Ciccaglioni, *Poteri e spazi politici*.

¹⁷ Ciccaglioni, *Poteri e spazi politici*; sulle signorie ‘di popolo’: Rao, *Signori di popolo*.

¹⁸ Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società*, 175-240.

¹⁹ Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 116-8.

²⁰ Su questa difficile fase Tanzini, *1345: la bancarotta*, con ampia discussione della storiografia precedente.

²¹ Poloni, *Trasformazioni della società*, 187-205.

Trenta i consanguinei immediati di un priore – padre, nonno, fratelli, figli – non potevano ricoprire la carica per un intero anno, proibizione ridotta a sei mesi per gli altri parenti, anche se l'applicazione della norma non era stringente e le eccezioni erano tutt'altro che rare.²² Dagli anni Cinquanta il divieto di un anno fu esteso a tutti i parenti di qualsiasi grado di parentela, un quadro compatibile con la presenza più debole delle grandi famiglie nel priorato di quegli anni.²³ Tuttavia, è evidente che i 'divieti' non sono una costrizione esterna calata dall'alto, sono espressione di una precisa volontà politica. In altre parole, quella di evitare eccessive concentrazioni di potere familiare e di garantire una distribuzione delle cariche relativamente ampia e dispersa – perlomeno, come si dirà, all'interno di un gruppo sociale dai contorni abbastanza ben definiti – fu una consapevole scelta politica dell'élite che governava la città nei primi decenni del Trecento, la quale avrebbe potuto facilmente promuovere una norma meno severa.

Un dato che ho trovato davvero sorprendente, in ogni caso, è l'alto tasso di ricambio politico negli anni che dovrebbero rappresentare il culmine dell'età dell'oro dell'oligarchia.²⁴ Tra le famiglie che ebbero accesso al priorato nel 1330-5, 42, ovvero più del 31% del totale (135 famiglie), vi avevano fatto il proprio ingresso negli anni Venti o negli anni Trenta: possono, in altre parole, essere considerate famiglie nuove. Nei 'democratici' anni 1370-5, se si prendono in considerazione solo le famiglie riconoscibili da un cognome, 48, ovvero poco più del 28% del totale (170 famiglie), erano entrate nel priorato negli anni Sessanta e Settanta. Anche in questo caso la mia valutazione sul grado di apertura del priorato di questi anni diverge da quella di Najemy.²⁵ Questa volta, tuttavia, il motivo è un po' più chiaro: lo studioso considera 'nuove' solo le famiglie entrate nel priorato dopo la riforma del 1328, mentre io ritengo che famiglie che fecero il loro primo ingresso nell'organo di vertice del comune nel corso degli anni Venti siano pienamente considerabili, all'inizio degli anni Trenta, famiglie nuove. Se si escludono dall'analisi gli uomini nuovi privi di cognome – ed è proprio questo, come si vedrà, il punto – il ricambio politico dei primi anni Trenta del Trecento appare in linea con quello degli anni Settanta, considerati dalla storiografia una fase di maggiore apertura.

Questo tasso di ricambio politico appare difficilmente compatibile con l'immagine, spesso proposta per i decenni immediatamente precedenti alla peste, di una mobilità sociale bloccata. Ma chi erano questi uomini che raggiunsero negli anni Venti e Trenta l'importante riconoscimento dell'accesso al priorato? È impossibile dirlo senza approfondite ricerche prosopografiche sui singoli individui. Sappiamo però che godevano già di una certa visibilità sociale, essendo identificati con un cognome: come detto, i priori non accompagnati da un cognome sono pochissimi in questi anni. L'ipotesi più plausibile

²² Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 108-9.

²³ Najemy, 190.

²⁴ La definizione di *the golden age of oligarchy* è di Najemy, 201.

²⁵ Najemy, 118-9.

è che si trattasse in molti casi di mercanti, banchieri o lanaioli. Anche se in questi anni il quadro della mercatura fiorentina appare fortemente gerarchizzato, a causa dello strapotere economico delle tre *super-companies* – Bardi, Peruzzi e Acciaiuoli –, l'impressione è che le attività commerciali e quelle industriali fossero ancora in grado di promuovere interessanti percorsi di mobilità sociale.²⁶

Quest'impressione mi è stata suggerita anche da un piccolo 'esperimento prosopografico' che certo non è particolarmente dirimente, data la ristrettezza del campione, ma mi pare fornisca almeno qualche spunto di riflessione. Una provvisione del marzo del 1337 ordinò la restituzione a 33 tra singoli cittadini e compagnie commerciali di 24.000 fiorini in totale ricevuti in prestito dal comune per la questione dell'acquisto di Arezzo.²⁷ Si tratta, come scrive Bernardino Barbadoro, delle "più note personalità dell'alta banca", e tra di esse si riconoscono ovviamente i cognomi più prestigiosi dell'élite economica e politica fiorentina:²⁸ Strozzi, Peruzzi, Acciaiuoli, Buonaccorsi, Albizzi, Alberti, Bardi – che erano magnati, ma erano rappresentati nel priorato dai soci popolari della loro grande compagnia –, a cui si aggiungono i meno potenti ma comunque affermati Davizzi, Davanzati, Ardinghelli, Guidalotti e dell'Antella. Tra le persone identificate solo attraverso il patronimico, Cenni di Nardo è un Rucellai, mentre Silvestro Alamanni non dovrebbe essere un membro della famiglia Alamanni, ma nientemeno che Salvestro di Alamanno Medici, protagonista quarant'anni dopo del tumulto dei Ciompi:²⁹ nel 1340 Salvestro contrasse il suo primo matrimonio, quindi, considerati i costumi matrimoniali della classe mercantile fiorentina, nel 1337 doveva essere certo molto giovane, ma non un ragazzino.³⁰

Altri mercanti appartenevano a famiglie meno autorevoli, in genere approdate al priorato nella generazione precedente.³¹ *Iohannes Lippi Lane* dovrebbe essere Giovanni di Lippo Aldobrandini, il cui padre era stato priore nel 1313 e nel 1314. *Nicolaus Bochini* è quasi certamente Niccolò di Bocchino Rimbaldesi, il cui padre era stato priore, primo della sua famiglia, nel 1312 e nel 1316. *Rinuccius Chochi* è il Rinuccio di Cocco indicato con il cognome Compagni nei collegi priorali del 1315 e del 1329, che tuttavia porta il cognome Cocchi nel 1336.³² Anche un fratello e socio di Rinuccio, Tuccio, alterna i due cognomi, mentre un terzo fratello, Giovanni, appare sempre con il cogno-

²⁶ Per il concetto di *super-companies* Hunt, *Medieval Super-Companies*; su questi aspetti rimando di nuovo a Tanzini, 1345: *la bancarotta*, e inoltre Tognetti, "Mercatura fiorentina prima e dopo la peste."

²⁷ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Provvisioni*, XXVIII, cc. 144r-v (<https://archiviodistatofirenze.cultura.gov.it/archiviodigitali/riproduzione/?id=305093&ua=116>). Su questa operazione: Barbadoro, *Finanze della repubblica fiorentina*, 589-92.

²⁸ Barbadoro, 589.

²⁹ Brucker, "The Medici."

³⁰ Brucker, 11.

³¹ Su molti degli operatori citati in queste pagine si veda anche Tognetti, "Mercatura fiorentina giura fedeltà."

³² Sui Cocchi-Compagni: Saporì, "L'interesse del denaro," 223.

me Compagni. Nei decenni successivi per questo gruppo familiare si fissò il cognome Cocchi. Questa vicenda dimostra come nella prima metà del Trecento i cognomi a Firenze non fossero una realtà cristallizzata. Il successo economico dei figli di Cocco portò probabilmente a una rifondazione della memoria familiare che trasformò il loro patronimico in un nuovo nome di famiglia; la loro fortuna conobbe tuttavia un grave rovescio con il fallimento nei primi anni Quaranta.³³ Per certi versi simile il caso di *Aldobrandinus Lapi Tanagli*, quasi certamente da identificare con l'Aldobrandino di Lapo Rinaldi che sedette più volte tra i priori e negli altri collegi di vertice negli anni Trenta, il quale però in alcune occasioni è identificato invece dal cognome Tanagli; il sesto di residenza è sempre Porta S. Piero. Il padre Lapo era stato priore più volte, la prima nel 1304. I suoi discendenti manterranno prevalentemente il cognome Rinaldi, ma Tanagli non scompare del tutto e rimane, non è chiaro con quali dinamiche, a indicare un ramo della famiglia nel Quattrocento.

Guido e Tolosino Del Fabbro appartengono ai Tolosini, famiglia la cui fortuna politica è più recente, e da ascriversi al fratello dei due, Bonaguida, entrato nel priorato nel 1318. Fabbro è il loro patronimico, ma non si fissò come cognome autonomo. Altri dei mercanti citati nel 1337 sono a quanto pare poco più che parvenu, le cui famiglie non erano ancora state premiate dal riconoscimento del priorato. La famiglia di Asino e Marco dell'Asino, per esempio, non è rappresentata in quegli anni nell'organo di vertice del comune: Sandro di Asino fu priore solo nel 1343, mentre Iacopo di Asino ebbe una discreta fortuna politica negli anni Sessanta, incorrendo tuttavia nell'inciampo delle ammonizioni.³⁴ La famiglia di Guccio da Uzzano, una delle più influenti negli ultimi decenni del secolo, non sembra essere approdata al priorato prima di quegli stessi anni Sessanta. D'altra parte, l'ascesa economica e sociale degli Asini e di Guccio subì una brusca battuta d'arresto in seguito al fallimento nei primi anni Quaranta.³⁵ Lapo Bombeni sedette nel priorato nel 1342, ma in quegli anni il gruppo familiare era impegnato in un fortunato percorso di radicamento nel Friuli.³⁶ Mannello Guidetti fu priore nel 1346, in pieno regime popolare, e la famiglia conobbe un certo rilievo politico nei decenni successivi. Anche la famiglia di Francesco Rinuccini raggiunse la visibilità politica solo con Francesco stesso alla fine degli anni Quaranta.³⁷ Francesco, del resto, ebbe un'enorme fortuna economica grazie al commercio internazionale: in occasione di una prestanza del 1364 appare come l'uomo più ricco della città.³⁸ Neri di Lippo è quasi certamente Neri di Lippo Del Palagio, che nel 1328 portò per la prima volta nel priorato una famiglia destinata a grande successo

³³ Saporì, 223; Tanzini, 1345: *la bancarotta, ad indicem*.

³⁴ Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 190.

³⁵ Tanzini, 1345: *la bancarotta di Firenze*, 53-4.

³⁶ Covacich, "Ruolo economico dei toscani."

³⁷ Fiumi, "Fioritura e decadenza," 413.

³⁸ Brucker, "The Medici," 6.

politico nei decenni successivi;³⁹ i Del Palagio erano immatricolati nell'arte della lana. Le famiglie di Guido Del Tegghia e di Filippo Piaciti non si trovano nel database delle *Tratte* fino al pieno Quattrocento. Non sono riuscita invece a identificare Dietifeci Filippi e Ghino Veri. Dietifeci potrebbe essere il padre di Niccolò di Dietifeci, lanaio di un certo livello, priore per la prima volta nel 1381 e capostipite dei Dietifeci;⁴⁰ in questo caso anche il padre potrebbe essere stato attivo nell'industria laniera, ma si tratta di una traccia labile.

Ci troviamo di fronte a una fotografia, benché molto parziale, dei livelli superiori del mondo del commercio, dell'industria e della banca alla fine degli anni Trenta del Trecento. Una fotografia che, come si visto, appare tutt'altro che monotona, e nella quale si possono distinguere diversi 'strati' di famiglie, alcune delle quali avevano dominato la vita economica e politica fiorentina dalla fine del Duecento, altre si erano affermate nei decenni successivi, altre ancora erano solo allora in via di affermazione. Un quadro, dunque, che appare del tutto compatibile con quanto emerso dall'analisi del priorato negli anni 1330-5, che ha messo in luce, come si è visto, la presenza non irrilevante di famiglie nuove. Se ne può concludere, con tutte le cautele necessarie, che, in una fase nella quale tra l'altro cominciavano a manifestarsi i sintomi di una grave crisi economica e finanziaria, la società fiorentina era ancora caratterizzata da un certo tasso di mobilità.⁴¹ La mercatura in particolare, nella sua accezione più ampia, rimaneva nonostante tutto un efficace canale di mobilità sociale.

3. 'Uomini nuovissimi'

Non è quindi di per sé il tasso di ricambio politico, ma la presenza di persone prive di cognome e di individui identificati attraverso la professione ciò che rende la fisionomia sociale del priorato post-1343 significativamente diversa da quella del priorato pre-1343, come emerge chiaramente dalla Tabella 2. Chi sono dunque, dopo il 1343, le persone accompagnate dall'indicazione di professione, praticamente assenti dal priorato nei primi decenni del Trecento? Si tratta di artigiani veri e propri ma anche, in quantità non irrilevante, di piccoli operatori locali e commercianti al dettaglio. Molti di essi erano immatricolati nelle arti minori. Se ne deduce che una delle principali ragioni dell'aumento esponenziale di persone identificate dalla professione è legata all'introduzione a partire dal 1343, con l'affermazione del governo degli uomini nuovi che guidò la città fino al 1348, di una quota di seggi destinati alle

³⁹ Come in molti altri casi, Neri compare nel priorato – per ben sei volte dal 1328 al 1343 – sempre con il cognome Del Palagio, mentre nei collegi è sempre registrato solo come Neri di Lippo; il sesto di residenza è comune sempre lo stesso, Porta S. Piero. Sulle sue attività economiche Hoshino, *L'arte della lana, ad indicem*.

⁴⁰ Hoshino, *ad indicem*.

⁴¹ Tanzini, 1345: *la bancarotta*.

quattordici arti minori. Negli anni Quaranta questa quota era pari a tre priori per ogni collegio, ridotta a due dagli anni Cinquanta.⁴² È bene sottolineare, in ogni caso, che prima del 1343 l'assenza di quote riservate per legge non significa proibizione di nominare gli artefici minuti tra i candidati al priorato, come dimostra l'elezione di un rigattiere nel 1335. Di fatto, tuttavia, la percentuale estremamente bassa di priori con indicazione di professione è un'ulteriore conferma di quanto già osservato dalla storiografia, ovvero che nella prima metà del Trecento l'organo di vertice del comune di Firenze era egemonizzato dalle arti maggiori, e la presenza degli immatricolati nelle arti minori era sporadica.⁴³ La partecipazione politica ai più alti livelli, per quanto, come si è visto, relativamente aperta e ampiamente distribuita, era comunque limitata agli immatricolati nelle arti maggiori.

Non a tutti gli immatricolati nelle arti maggiori, comunque. Un'analisi un po' più approfondita ci mostra infatti che una percentuale non irrilevante delle persone identificate con la professione nei priorati successivi al 1343 è riconducibile in realtà proprio alle corporazioni maggiori. Nel 1345-50 questa percentuale è pari a un po' più del 24%: si tratta di sette ritagliatori/pannaioli, sei speciali, tre cambiatori, tre lanaioli, tre tintori, uno stamaiolo, un *boldronarius* (presumibilmente un addetto alla lavorazione dei boldroni) – categorie, le ultime tre, sottoposte all'arte della lana – due farsettai (arte di Por Santa Maria), due setaioli, un notaio, un orefice e un vaiaio: 31 in tutto. Nel 1370-5 la percentuale di immatricolati o sottoposti alle arti maggiori tra i priori con indicazione di professione sale a più del 32%: sette lanaioli, due stamaioli, sette speciali, quattro cambiatori, quattro setaioli, quattro ritagliatori, due merciai, due orefici, un vaiaio, 33 in tutto. Ma la presenza di bottegai e commercianti al dettaglio, come si è detto, è consistente anche tra i membri delle arti minori. Nel 1345-50 queste categorie costituiscono un altro 36,7% circa delle persone accompagnate dalla professione: tredici beccai, otto fornai, sette vinattieri, sette rigattieri, quattro pizzicagnoli, quattro biadaioi, tre linaioi e un albergatore, 47 individui in tutto. Nel 1370-5 si tratta di cinque beccai, cinque pizzicagnoli, quattro osti, quattro pannilini (come venivano spesso chiamati i linaioi nella seconda metà del Trecento), quattro vinattieri, due rigattieri, un biadaio e un fornaio, 26 in tutto, un altro 25,5% circa del totale delle persone con professione. Molti di questi bottegai non dovevano avere una condizione economica e una fisionomia sociale radicalmente diversa da quelli – merciai, farsettai, ritagliatori ecc. –, che si trovavano inquadrati nelle arti maggiori.⁴⁴

⁴² Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 143-4, 184-5.

⁴³ Najemy, 118-9.

⁴⁴ *In economic status, in business activity, in mentality and outlook, there was little to distinguish the lower guildsmen from the druggists, notaries and retail merchants of the arti maggiori. Their economic interests were predominantly local, in contrast to the Europe-wide activities of the big business class*: Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 46.

Una percentuale schiacciante delle persone identificate con la professione si trova tra gli individui privi di cognome: addirittura l'88,2% nel 1345-50, ancora il 67,6% nel 1370-5. D'altra parte, nel 1345-50 il 78,5% dei priori senza cognome era accompagnato anche dall'indicazione di professione, percentuale che si alza a più dell'83% nel 1370-5. Essere conosciuti in città attraverso un nome di famiglia è nella Firenze del Trecento già di per sé un indicatore di successo sociale. Le persone di origini umili o comunque provenienti da famiglie economicamente deboli e dotate di scarsa visibilità sociale e politica non avevano un cognome. Per loro, l'indicazione di professione ha prima di tutto una funzione di riconoscimento, date le frequentissime omonimie, ma indica anche la centralità della professione svolta nella loro identità sociale. Dunque, queste persone escluse dal priorato fino al 1343 e ammesse in seguito hanno una fisionomia sociale piuttosto precisa: si tratta di artigiani, operatori locali e bottegai, immatricolati tanto nelle arti minori quanto nelle arti maggiori, uomini nuovi o 'nuovissimi' che in larghissima maggioranza non avevano una famiglia affermata e conosciuta alle spalle e dovevano in buona parte la loro riconoscibilità sociale alla loro professione.⁴⁵

Nel 1343, con l'affermazione del nuovo regime e di nuovi meccanismi di selezione per le cariche di vertice, è come se crollasse improvvisamente un muro, e assistiamo, come mostra la Tabella 2, all'irruzione in massa di queste persone nel collegio esecutivo del comune. Bisogna, tuttavia, cercare di guardare oltre le apparenze. Il fatto che questa componente sociale venga alla ribalta da un giorno all'altro grazie al mutamento del clima politico non significa che essa sia stata protagonista di una rapidissima mobilità sociale di gruppo, consumatasi nei primi anni Quaranta. Certo molti di questi uomini nuovi avranno in qualche modo beneficiato della redistribuzione di ricchezza innescata dalla grave crisi delle famiglie più influenti, conseguente alla catastrofica ondata di fallimenti di quegli anni.⁴⁶ Ma è interessante guardare alla loro diversa capacità, nei due intervalli 1345-50 e 1370-5, di consolidare la propria presenza ai vertici della politica fiorentina, come riassunta nella Tabella 4.

Tabella 4. *Distribuzione dei seggi dei priori a Firenze (1345-75): consolidamento delle posizioni al vertice*

Anni	Uomini nuovi con un solo priorato	Uomini nuovi con più priorati	Uomini nuovi con un solo priorato ma presenti negli altri due collegi
1345-50	70,1%	19,4%	10,5%
1370-5	8,4%	69,9%	21,7%

Fonte: vedi Tabella 1.

⁴⁵ Questi uomini nuovi hanno attirato in particolare l'attenzione di Gene Brucker e Marvin Becker: Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 40-8; Becker, "An Essay;" Becker, "Florentine 'Libertas'." Mi permetto di rimandare anche a Poloni, "Oltre Coluccio Salutati."

⁴⁶ Poloni, "Un decennio catastrofico?"

La schiacciante maggioranza (più del 70%) degli individui privi di cognome che entrarono nel priorato nel 1345-50 ricoprì la carica una sola volta nell'arco della propria vita, e non fu mai più presente nemmeno negli altri due collegi di vertice, i dodici e i gonfalonieri delle società. Certo, non si deve dimenticare che l'intervallo 1345-50 comprende l'esperienza drammatica della prima epidemia di peste: è probabile che molti degli uomini nuovi siano semplicemente morti senza avere occasione di consolidare la loro nuova visibilità politica. Resta il fatto che per la stragrande maggioranza di essi l'approdo al priorato fu un'esperienza unica e isolata, dettata probabilmente dalle circostanze eccezionali di quegli anni, più che da un consistente miglioramento delle condizioni economiche, della posizione sociale e dello status dei singoli individui e del gruppo nel suo complesso. Negli anni Settanta del Trecento, la situazione appare esattamente rovesciata. Quasi il 70% delle persone senza cognome giunse al priorato più volte nel corso della propria vita. Alcune di esse ebbero carriere politiche di tutto rispetto, come il beccaio Antonio di Martino, nove volte priore, il merciaio Michele di Nardo e il vinattiere Niccolò di Nome, otto volte ognuno, il lanaiolo Giovanni di Giunta, sei volte, solo per fare qualche esempio. Anche solo dalla consultazione del database delle *Tratte* emerge che alcuni di questi uomini nuovi diedero origine a famiglie destinate a una certa fortuna: il correggiaio Dino di Nuccio (priore per quattro volte) cominciò già nel corso della sua vita a essere indicato con il cognome Miniati, il tavolacciaio Nuccio di Matteo (priore per cinque volte) fu il capostipite dei Solosmei, dal *mercator* Piero di Bino (sei volte) discesero i Bini,⁴⁷ da Simone di Buonarrota (tre volte) derivarono i Simoni, mentre Cantino di Agnolo (priore per cinque volte) lasciò ai posteri il cognome Del Canto. Un'indagine più approfondita porterebbe probabilmente alla luce molti più casi.

Mi pare quindi si possa dire che, mentre molti degli uomini nuovi degli anni Quaranta del Trecento furono trascinati nel priorato dalla paralisi dell'élite, in preda a una crisi economica e politica drammatica, e dal radicale cambio di regime, nella seconda metà del secolo i commercianti, i bottegai, i piccoli imprenditori e gli artigiani entravano nel collegio di vertice del comune a coronamento di felici percorsi di mobilità sociale, intraprendevano brillanti carriere politiche e tramandavano ai loro discendenti una buona visibilità sociale. È probabilmente una conferma di questa differenza l'aumento del numero di persone accompagnate dall'indicazione della professione anche tra i priori dotati di cognome, che rappresentano solo l'11,8% degli individui identificati dalla professione nel 1345-50, ma il 32,4% nel 1370-5. Si tratta sempre di ritagliatori, speciali, setaioli, pannilini, lanaioli, merciai ecc., ma evidentemente a uno stadio un po' più avanzato di consolidamento della propria posizione sociale.

⁴⁷ Piero di Bino doveva ormai essere molto anziano; era stato fattore dei Bardi (Sapori, "Il personale delle compagnie," 749) e poi nei primi anni Cinquanta aveva fondato una compagnia bancaria con altri *parvenu* (Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 40-1).

4. *Un tentativo di interpretazione*

A partire dal lungo discorso sviluppato nelle pagine precedenti, si può quindi tentare di aggiungere qualche sfumatura a quanto già sappiamo sulla mobilità sociale a Firenze nella prima metà del Trecento. Pur nell'impossibilità, in assenza di dati statistici, di misurare il tasso di mobilità e le sue variazioni nel tempo, il permanere di un buon ricambio politico pare poco compatibile con l'idea di una società bloccata. Il principale canale di mobilità sembra essere rappresentato dalla mercatura (oltre che, come in tutta l'epoca comunale, dal notariato e dagli studi di diritto). Detto in altri termini, per un fiorentino il raggiungimento di una posizione sociale tale da essere preso in considerazione per le più alte cariche del comune passava principalmente attraverso il successo nel commercio e nella banca internazionali, o nell'industria laniera. Il settore laniero, tuttavia, sembra essere più disomogeneo e polarizzato rispetto agli altri due; l'apertura del priorato agli uomini nuovi a partire dagli anni Quaranta consente di vedere che, accanto agli operatori maggiori impegnati soprattutto nella produzione per i mercati internazionali, esistevano numerosi lanaioli privi di cognome, che appartenevano in fondo, per fisionomia sociale, a quello stesso strato di commercianti al dettaglio e bottegai ai quali si è spesso fatto riferimento. Bisogna sottolineare, tuttavia, che la mercatura non era una strada riservata a pochi nel peculiare contesto della Firenze del primo Trecento. Antonella Astorri ha pubblicato un censimento realizzato nel settembre del 1322 su mandato della Mercanzia, che registra tutti coloro che erano impegnati nel commercio sovrallocale e si dedicavano all'import-export a media e lunga distanza.⁴⁸ Si tratta di 262 tra compagnie e singoli mercanti, per 338 nomi complessivi citati, che tuttavia nascondono il coinvolgimento di un numero di gran lunga maggiore di individui, poiché le aziende sono indicate solo con la ragione sociale e in molti casi si fa riferimento all'esistenza di soci o di parenti collegati. Nell'elenco compaiono i grandi nomi del commercio internazionale ma anche molti sconosciuti; sono questi, potremmo dire, a rappresentare il bacino sociale al quale il priorato poteva attingere per il suo rinnovamento.

Per un padre ambizioso, insomma, la strada più sicura per cercare di innalzare lo status della propria famiglia era piazzare i propri figli nella bottega di un mercante, un banchiere o un lanaiolo di un certo calibro. Sembra invece molto difficile, per un fiorentino del primo Trecento, migliorare la propria posizione sociale, fino a essere nominato per il priorato, facendo il ritagliatore di panni (o pannaiolo), lo speziale, il merciaio, il setaiolo – lo sviluppo della grande industria serica fiorentina è successivo –, persino il lanaiolo che produceva per il mercato interno;⁴⁹ quasi impossibile facendo il linaiolo, il rigattiere, il pizzicagnolo, il vinattiere, l'oste ecc. È questa la vera differenza

⁴⁸ Astorri, "Gli spazi politici."

⁴⁹ Sullo sviluppo dell'industria serica fiorentina Tognetti, *Un'industria di lusso*.

rispetto alla seconda metà del Trecento, una differenza che non può essere ricondotta semplicemente ai dettagli tecnici dei processi di selezione al priorato. Le leggi elettorali, come si è detto, erano frutto di una precisa volontà politica, come oggi, e l'allargamento delle commissioni elettorali nella seconda metà del secolo è in buona parte il frutto della pressione degli uomini nuovi in ascesa economica e sociale, come la storiografia ha da lungo tempo chiarito.⁵⁰ Questa pressione, evidentemente, era molto più debole nei primi decenni del Trecento. D'altra parte, il predominio assoluto delle arti maggiori non spiega perché i loro membri, quando chiamati a selezionare i nomi da inserire nelle borse dei priori e degli altri collegi di vertice, prendessero in scarsissima considerazione pannaioli, setaioli, merciai, speciali e piccoli lanaioli, immatricolati, in effetti, nelle loro corporazioni. È un fatto, insomma, che gli uomini che facevano parte delle commissioni elettorali, più o meno ampie che fossero, erano disposti a nominare alle massime cariche del comune persone appartenenti a famiglie estranee alla loro cerchia, purché si dedicassero al commercio sovrallocale o alla banca; non erano invece disposti a nominare, se non in rari casi, commercianti al dettaglio e bottegai di origine oscura (figuriamoci gli artigiani veri e propri). Per contro, non bisogna nemmeno esagerare l'apertura dei sistemi elettorali della seconda metà del Trecento. La prima fase, quella della preparazione delle liste degli eleggibili, prevedeva in effetti l'inclusione di migliaia di persone.⁵¹ Proprio per questo, tuttavia, la vera selezione era spostata alla seconda fase, quella dello scrutinio, affidata a una commissione relativamente ampia, i cui membri però erano scelti per il 70% dagli esponenti uscenti dei tre collegi di vertice.⁵² Anche i consoli delle arti, uno per ciascuna delle 21 corporazioni, chiamati a prendere parte allo scrutinio, venivano selezionati dagli uomini al governo. L'approvazione dei singoli nomi richiedeva una maggioranza di due terzi dei votanti. Per superare lo sbarramento era dunque necessario essere persone piuttosto conosciute, che godevano di una certa approvazione sociale ed erano ben inserite nelle giuste reti di relazione. Questo spiega probabilmente perché, come si è detto, nella seconda metà del Trecento l'ingresso di un uomo nuovo nel priorato era in genere il coronamento di un percorso riuscito di mobilità sociale.

Insomma, a me pare che, al netto dei cambiamenti nei sistemi elettorali, la diversa fisionomia sociale del priorato degli anni Trenta del Trecento rispetto a quello degli anni Settanta rifletta differenze reali nel contesto economico e sociale delle due epoche. In altri interventi ho cercato di dimostrare, per le città italiane, che l'ascesa economica, sociale e persino politica dello specifico gruppo sociale sul quale ho concentrato l'attenzione nelle pagine precedenti, il 'ceto medio' dei piccoli imprenditori del tessile, dei commercianti al dettaglio, dei bottegai, è uno dei fenomeni più significativi della seconda

⁵⁰ Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*; Becker, "An Essay."

⁵¹ Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, 176-7.

⁵² Najemy, 180.

metà del Trecento.⁵³ Essa è legata in modo complesso alle trasformazioni economiche innescate dalla peste, in particolare all'aumento e soprattutto alla diversificazione dei consumi che coinvolgono tutte le componenti sociali, e determinano un ampliamento e rafforzamento del mercato interno, che acquista un crescente rilievo economico.⁵⁴ A partire da questo quadro, si può tentare di formulare un'ipotesi che spieghi le caratteristiche osservate per i primi decenni del Trecento. Con l'esaurirsi dell'onda lunga della crescita duecentesca, innescata dallo straordinario boom demografico, è probabile che in città la contrazione dei salari – fenomeno ben attestato – e la stagnazione dei redditi, e nel contado l'indebolimento della piccola proprietà causata dalla frammentazione delle terre e dalla penetrazione aggressiva della proprietà cittadina, abbiano reso difficile, per ampie fasce della popolazione, accedere a consumi voluttuari diversificati. Queste condizioni poco favorevoli potrebbero aver frenato lo sviluppo – nella direzione di una maggiore articolazione, complessità, importanza economica e di conseguenza sociale – di tutto il settore economico che serviva prevalentemente il mercato interno. Ciò, in considerazione dei livelli demografici ancora elevati, non avrebbe comportato tanto una flessione quantitativa degli operatori locali – che, come si è visto, dopo l'apertura del priorato nel 1343 irrompono in gran numero –, quanto l'impossibilità per la maggior parte di essi di distaccarsi da una dimensione di piccolissimo commercio al dettaglio e acquistare una dimensione imprenditoriale tale da ambire a una carriera politica ai più alti livelli.

In altre parole, nella prima metà del Trecento sembra molto difficile, anche se ovviamente non del tutto impossibile, che un ritagliatore di panni, uno speziale, un pannolino, un pizzicagnolo, un rigattiere o persino un lanaiolo non impegnato nella produzione per i mercati esteri riescano a raggiungere una ricchezza paragonabile a quella dei mercanti-banchieri internazionali, una circostanza che, come ci mostrano le fonti fiscali, è invece tutt'altro che rara all'inizio del Quattrocento.⁵⁵ In città queste persone erano, negli anni Trenta, forse più numerose che negli anni Settanta, ma probabilmente erano, nella grande maggioranza dei casi, operatori economici di dimensione più modesta, con minore successo economico, minore visibilità e, di conseguenza, minore considerazione sociale. È questo, infatti, l'aspetto più rilevante: il successo economico di molte di queste figure nella seconda metà del Trecento contribuì probabilmente a dotarle di una 'rispettabilità sociale' che in precedenza non avevano. Era, appunto, la mancanza di questa rispettabilità sociale a tenerle fuori dal priorato, e a far sì che, nei primi decenni del secolo, le professioni commerciali legate al mercato interno funzionassero ben poco come canali di mobilità sociale.

⁵³ Poloni, "Viva lo 'nperadore';" Poloni, "Mobilità sociale dopo la peste;" Poloni, "Quattro mesi molto intensi."

⁵⁴ Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 265-407.

⁵⁵ Goldthwaite, 560-7. Sui rigattieri si veda anche il capitolo di Todeschini in questo volume.

5. Mobilità sociale e disuguaglianza economica

Dal punto di vista teorico, il rapporto tra disuguaglianza economica e mobilità sociale non è stato davvero chiarito e, a ben guardare, non è stato nemmeno oggetto di particolare attenzione.⁵⁶ Ciò è dovuto principalmente al fatto che, in relazione alle società contemporanee, i due fenomeni sono studiati da due discipline diverse: il tema della disuguaglianza ha attirato negli ultimi anni un forte interesse da parte degli economisti, mentre quello della mobilità sociale è da tempo un ‘cavallo di battaglia’ dei sociologi. Le due comunità scientifiche utilizzano metodi differenti e, come si è accennato nel primo paragrafo, si servono di dati diversi. Mi limiterò in ogni caso, a conclusione di questo articolo, a qualche considerazione piuttosto generica.

Il livello di disuguaglianza della società fiorentina alla fine del medioevo – o, se vogliamo, alle soglie del rinascimento – è stato valutato in modo opposto da due grandi studiosi della Toscana medievale. David Herlihy ha ipotizzato un forte aumento della polarizzazione della società toscana in generale dopo la peste,⁵⁷ mentre Richard Goldthwaite, interpretando diversamente gli stessi dati, ha al contrario messo in luce, almeno per la Firenze del Quattrocento, una distribuzione della ricchezza non così squilibrata, e meno diseguale rispetto a quella che caratterizza molte realtà a noi contemporanee.⁵⁸ Non riprenderò i termini di un dibattito che è ben conosciuto tra i medievisti, e che è stato efficacemente riassunto anche di recente.⁵⁹ Del resto, Guido Alfani e Francesco Ammannati hanno segnalato una serie di errori metodologici commessi da Herlihy nel trattamento delle fonti fiscali, smontando sostanzialmente il suo quadro interpretativo.⁶⁰ I due studiosi hanno dimostrato, sulla base di una rielaborazione metodologicamente assai raffinata dei dati desumibili dalle rilevazioni fiscali, che i decenni successivi all’epidemia di peste di metà Trecento furono in effetti caratterizzati, in Toscana come in molti altri contesti europei, da una diminuzione evidente della disuguaglianza, misurata attraverso l’indice di Gini.

Tuttavia, a causa del panorama poco confortante delle fonti, il lavoro di Alfani e Ammannati non prende in considerazione proprio la città di Firenze.

⁵⁶ Ci sono però rilevanti e promettenti eccezioni, in particolare il progetto di ricerca finanziato dallo European Research Council dal titolo *SMITE – Social Mobility and Inequality across Italy and Europe, 1300-1800* (SMITE, ERC Consolidator Grant, 2017-21, no. 725687: <https://dondena.unibocconi.eu/research-projects/smite>) diretto da Guido Alfani, che riguarda proprio il rapporto tra mobilità sociale e disuguaglianza nel lungo periodo. Il tema è anche oggetto di approfondimento nella LV Settimana Datini (“La mobilità sociale nelle società preindustriali: tendenze, cause ed effetti (secc. XIII-XVIII)”, Prato, 12-6 maggio 2024: <https://www.istitutodatinini.it/temi/htm/temi55.htm>).

⁵⁷ Herlihy, “The Distribution of Wealth,” Herlihy, “Santa Maria Impruneta.”

⁵⁸ Goldthwaite, “Economy of Renaissance Italy,” Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 546-82.

⁵⁹ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-Term Trends.” Tra i numerosi studi di Alfani sul tema della disuguaglianza economica in prospettiva storica si veda almeno Alfani, “Economic Inequality.”

⁶⁰ Alfani, Ammannati, “Long-Term Trends.”

In ogni caso, nel loro articolo i due studiosi inseriscono una preziosa tabella che illustra, per alcune realtà toscane – il contado di Firenze, Arezzo, Prato e San Gimignano con il suo contado – la distribuzione della ricchezza per decili, dalla quale mi pare emergano dati di grande interesse. Gli economisti hanno spesso definito la classe media come *the middle 60 percent*, ovvero il 60% di famiglie comprese tra il fortunato 20% con un reddito più alto e il 20% con il reddito più basso, le persone povere o a rischio povertà. Questa definizione è stata criticata da più direzioni, e sostituita in alcuni studi da definizioni più raffinate.⁶¹ Per il nostro scopo, tuttavia, essa è più che accettabile: si adatta bene alla presentazione dei dati nel lavoro di Alfani e Ammannati, e consente comunque di tracciare delle linee di tendenza, se non di proporre un'analisi dettagliata. Dunque, il 60% di mezzo corrisponde, nel prospetto di Alfani e Ammannati, ai sei decili compresi tra i due decili più poveri (il primo e il secondo) e i due decili più ricchi (il nono e il decimo). La Tabella 5 riassume la percentuale della ricchezza complessiva detenuta dalla classe media e dal 20% più benestante in diversi momenti.

Tabella 5. *Percentuale della ricchezza complessiva detenuta dalla classe media e dal 20% più benestante ad Arezzo, Prato e San Gimignano (1300-1650)*

	Anno	60% di mezzo	20% più ricco
Prato	1300	21,5%	75%
	1350	38,7%	66,7%
	1400		
	1450	27,8%	70,8%
	1650	15,2%	84,8%
San Gimignano	1300	22,3%	76%
	1350	30,1%	68,5%
	1400	31,9%	66,53%
	1450	39,8%	68,9%
	1650	34%	65,6%
Arezzo	1300		
	1350		
	1400	39,5%	54,9%
	1450	32,3%	71%
	1650	24%	75,3%

Fonte: Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-Term Trends," 1093, table 4.

È chiaro che c'era una bella differenza, in termini di condizioni economiche, tra chi apparteneva al terzo decile, quello più vicino ai due più bassi, e chi all'ottavo, a un soffio dai due più elevati. Tuttavia, la tendenza è chiara: al

⁶¹ Atkinson, Brandolini, "On the Identification."

di là delle differenze locali – San Gimignano, che è anche la comunità economicamente più debole, non tornò più ai livelli di disuguaglianza della prima metà del Trecento – i decenni successivi alla peste videro una diminuzione molto netta della polarizzazione, che riprese però a crescere in seguito per raggiungere e superare, in piena età moderna, i livelli trecenteschi. Anche se i dati non riguardano Firenze, mi pare che siano molto compatibili con quanto osservato sulla crescita, in termini di rilievo economico e visibilità sociale, della classe media dopo il 1350. Come per le realtà vicine, la società fiorentina della prima metà del secolo era probabilmente più polarizzata di quella della seconda metà del secolo, e la diminuzione della polarizzazione sembra collegata al rafforzamento economico di quel composito gruppo di imprenditori locali, commercianti al dettaglio, bottegai, nonché dello strato superiore degli artigiani, di cui si è parlato nelle pagine precedenti, i quali ricadevano verosimilmente, in gran parte, nel ‘60% di mezzo’.

Più difficilmente risolvibile, come si è detto, la questione del rapporto tra mobilità sociale e disuguaglianza economica. Anche se nella realtà è evidente che la mobilità sociale tende a crescere con il diminuire delle disuguaglianze, in via del tutto teorica non è inimmaginabile una società fortemente polarizzata eppure molto mobile. Sembra in effetti che nella prima metà del Trecento quella fiorentina si avvicinasse al modello di una società piuttosto polarizzata eppure relativamente mobile. Torniamo a uno dei mercanti citati nelle pagine precedenti, Francesco Rinuccini, protagonista di un folgorante percorso di mobilità sociale. Non abbiamo idea di cosa facessero il padre Cino (Rinuccino) e il nonno Lapo, immigrato forse da Quona, nel Valdarno, a pochi chilometri da Firenze, ma essi appartenevano presumibilmente al ‘60% di mezzo’.⁶² Se avessimo rilevazioni fiscali per gli anni Trenta o Quaranta del Trecento, vedremmo probabilmente che il grande successo nel commercio internazionale aveva proiettato Francesco in uno dei due decili più ricchi: la sua ascesa del resto continuò dopo la metà del secolo, e lo portò nel 1364 a diventare il contribuente più ricco della città.⁶³ La fortuna di Francesco non contribuì quindi ad aumentare la quota di ricchezza detenuta dalla classe media, poiché proprio questa fortuna lo spinse rapidamente fuori da essa. Al contrario, molti degli speciali, ritagliatori, farsettai, merciai, lanaioli di piccolo e medio calibro della seconda metà del secolo raggiunsero un notevole benessere, senza però approdare tra i più ricchi della città, partecipando così al rafforzamento economico della classe media. Detto in altre parole, si può ipotizzare che nei primi decenni del Trecento il commercio sovralocale e la finanza fossero canali ancora attivi di mobilità sociale, ma proprio il fatto che essi consentissero, ai fortunati che riuscivano nell’impresa, un rapido accumulo di ricchezze contribuiva ad accentuare, piuttosto che a smorzare, la polarizzazione e la disuguaglianza economica.

⁶² Fiumi, “Fioritura e decadenza,” 413.

⁶³ Brucker, “The Medici,” 6.

Si sarà notato che queste pagine sono costellate di ‘è possibile’, ‘probabilmente’, ‘verosimilmente’ ecc. Molte delle proposte interpretative che ho avanzato sono largamente ipotetiche, e non è mia intenzione farle passare come certezze. Non so quanto del quadro che ho tracciato resisterebbe a un’indagine specifica più approfondita – che tuttavia ancora manca persino per Firenze, nonostante la ricchezza della storiografia –, ma la mia speranza è che questo saggio rappresenti almeno un piccolo stimolo per riaprire il dibattito.

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Economic inequalities and transformations of the rural world in the Iberian Peninsula before and after the Black Death

by Antoni Furió

Il saggio studia la disuguaglianza economica nella penisola iberica nel tardo Medioevo, dalla metà del XIII secolo alla fine del XV secolo, basandosi su tre casi di studio – Olite, Oriola e Vera – situati nel nord e nel sud-est della penisola. A tal fine sono state utilizzate fonti fiscali, le più comuni in questo tipo di ricerche, ma anche una fonte meno conosciuta e finora non utilizzata per lo studio della disuguaglianza, come i cosiddetti *libros de repartimiento* (libri di ripartizione), che registrano le donazioni ai coloni cristiani durante il processo di colonizzazione che seguì le grandi conquiste del Duecento e, di nuovo, alla fine del Quattrocento. I risultati ottenuti utilizzando diversi indici di misura sono contestualizzati e confrontati con quelli disponibili per altre località della penisola allo scopo di offrire una visione d'insieme.

This article studies economic inequality in late medieval Iberia, from the mid-thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century, based on three observatories – Olite, Oriola and Vera – located in the north and southeast of the peninsula. To this end, we have used fiscal sources, the most common in this type of research, as well as a lesser-known source that has not previously been used to study inequality: the so-called *libros de repartimiento* (distribution books), which record the allocations made to Christian settlers during the colonization process that followed the great conquests of the thirteenth century and again at the end of the fifteenth century. The results obtained from the various measurement indexes are contextualised and compared with those available for other sites in the peninsula in order to provide an overall view.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XV, penisola iberica, registri fiscali, *repartimientos*, disuguaglianze economiche.

Middle Ages, 13th-15th centuries, Iberian Peninsula, fiscal sources, distribution books, economic inequality.

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1. Introduction

The economic and social inequalities in the European countryside around 1300 were a very visible reality, not only in the relations between lords and peasants or between town and country, but also in the internal differences between the peasants themselves.¹ Referring to England, Rodney Hilton argued that the division within the peasantry between “a wealthy minority, a solid middle peasantry and a significant proportion of smallholders” is already readily apparent in the Domesday Book of 1086.² The Iberian sources also testify to these internal differences from the moment there are sources that allow us a glimpse inside the peasant world.³ And this has been the case since the early Middle Ages, when in the peasant communities of the north of the peninsula, in both the east, Catalonia, and the west, the kingdom of León,

¹ This chapter has been carried out in the framework of the research projects PID2021-120838NB-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by “ERDF A way of making Europe”, by the European Union, and CIPROM/2022/46, funded by the Generalitat Valenciana.

² Hilton, “Inequality among medieval peasants,” 272. In his opinion, the stratification of the medieval peasantry could not only be attributed to commercialisation, to the markets in land and agricultural products. Long before that, a great dividing line of the medieval peasantry was that which separated the free from the unfree, which did not always coincide with that between the rich and the poor. But many other elements and in particular the complex interplay between land availability, technical progress, inheritance and endowment customs, demands for rent and tax, and the peasants’ capacity to resist must also be examined. For the British Marxist historian, “the relative strength of these various factors changed considerably during the medieval period, especially between 1300 and 1500 circa, when the land/labour ratio shifted dramatically”, with two main consequences for the peasantry: more good land became available and the rent burden on holdings diminished. All this in turn had important effects for the internal stratification of the peasantry, with the considerable reduction in the number of smallholders, the strengthening of the middle stratum, and with the rich peasants’ improvement of their position – although not as consistently as the middle peasants.

³ In addition to written sources, in recent years historians have increasingly turned to archaeology to address the question of social inequality within early medieval peasant societies through the study of materiality and in particular household goods within the context of the village. An ‘archaeology of the peasantry’ has thus developed, in particular for the central part of Iberia between the seventh and the tenth centuries, which has made it possible to reveal the hidden inequalities in the presence of significant burials and funerary rituals, consumption patterns, settlement hierarchies, types of diet, craft production (the discovery of prestigious objects – e.g., rings and brooches – in households or in burial grounds is regarded as “an indicator of elites and territorial aristocracies, establishing an identity between portable wealth and social status”), forms of exclusion and participation (the presence of domestic slaves and of subservient groups) within the peasant communities. The material record allows us to detect the existence of important internal social hierarchies of a high class of peasants, of local leaders who play a leading role in the relationships and the conflicts with regional monasteries and other external agents. See in this respect Tejerizo *et al.*, “Social inequality and household,” and the two books edited by Quirós, *Social Complexity* and *Social Inequality*. In his conclusion to the latter volume, Chris Wickham insists not only that villages were far from homogeneous – they were internally differentiated – but also on the complementarity of both types of sources: “the archaeology and the documentary record in this context tell us quite analogous things, and if both are tackled with sufficient subtlety, there does not have to be (as there often is) an imbalance in the sorts of information each can give us – for inequality has a very material element in almost all cases, and is thus visible archaeologically. We can use both sets of data in similar ways, that is to say, in dialogue”: Wickham, ‘Conclusion.’

and even in Navarre, one finds several mentions of *boni homines* or *probi homines*, a small group of men who, in addition to personal fortune or wealth, exercised a kind of authority and influence over the rest of the inhabitants.⁴ If these *probi homines*, these local elites,⁵ occupied the vertex of the social pyramid, the base consisted of a majority of free peasants, and below that, a significant percentage of slaves. Indeed, the first major demarcation line in the peasant world around the year 1000 was that separating the free from the unfree.

Beyond legal differentiation, which persisted until the end of the Middle Ages, e.g., in Catalonia with the serfs called *de remença*,⁶ economic inequalities widened between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries with economic growth, the commercialisation of the economy, a partible and egalitarian inheritance system and the dynamism of the land market.⁷ The more the economy grew, the wider the gap between rich and poor in the rural world became, even among the peasants themselves. The rich got richer, and the poor poorer, as attested by the documentary sources of the time, both fiscal and notarial, which show the concentration of wealth in a few hands. For the earliest periods, particularly the early Middle Ages, historians relied mainly, as we have seen, on archaeological and material sources for the study of inequality. But

⁴ The first expression is already documented in the tenth century, to be progressively replaced by the second in the twelfth century. Both terms initially alluded to persons of acknowledged rectitude and moral authority, with an important role as local arbitrators and in the internal systems of conflict resolution, to become advisors to the *veguer/vicario* or the *batlle* (bailiff) of the village, both in the judicial and administrative spheres. Bowman, *Shifting Landmarks*; Carlé, "Boni homines;" Davies, "*Boni homines*;" Estepa, "Poder y propiedad;" Font, *Estudis sobre els drets, passim*; Lopetegui, "Conflictos y pleitos;" Luis, "Lugares de reunión;" Sabaté, "Ejes vertebradores;" Turull, "Nuevas hipótesis."

⁵ It is worth reproducing the profile of the elites outlined by Wickham by synthesising the different contributions on North-Western Iberia gathered in the book cited above: they "could have – and they normally had – more land [...], and thus more wealth, which they could and did display [...] they could have public positions, as figures in public courts such as [...] *vigarii*; they could be priests, and/or could control the local church; they could be clients of kings, powerful churchmen, aristocrats; sometimes they were actually local bailiffs for external landowners of that type. They often were all these things at once, and in that case we can assume that they really were locally dominant; that could in some cases be a way to move to the next step, in which they became small-scale lords in their own right, although that tended to be a development of the century or so after 1000, in the world of castles and signorial/señorial powers [...] Villages do not have to be rich – in anything – to be internally unequal; local élites simply have to have access to more things, and less easily-available things, than their neighbours. And they visibly did"; Wickham, "Conclusion," 357-60.

⁶ *Remença* in Catalan or *redimentia* in Latin was the ransom that peasants had to pay to their lord in order to be able to leave the land, which equated their situation to that of serfs. It was widespread mainly in the north-east of Catalonia and was not abolished until 1486. See Salrach "Orígens del problema remença;" Freedman, "Origins of peasant servitude;" Feliu, "El pes econòmic;" To Figueras, "Servitude et mobilité paysanne;" Lluch, "Els remences."

⁷ Sesma, *Transformación social y revolución comercial*; Sesma, Laliena, *Crecimiento económico*; Laliena, "Le marché de la terre" and *Siervos medievales*; García de Cortázar, "Crecimiento económico;" Furió, "El mercado de la tierra," "Reproducción familiar" and "Producción agraria, comercialización;" García, "Sistemas familiares y práctica sucesoria" and "Igualdad hereditaria;" García-Oliver, "L'expansió (1200-1350);" To Figueras, "Una economia comercialitzada;" Pacheco, "Familia y sucesión;" Godoy, "Crecimiento agrario y explotaciones campesinas."

from the thirteenth century onwards we have written sources, both fiscal, in particular the wealth registers recording the assets of each taxpayer in order to calculate the taxable base, and notarial, namely the *post-mortem* inventories providing very detailed lists of the movable and immovable property of the testators who had just died. I must say, however, that unlike tax registers, which indicate the value of each asset, since their purpose is to know the total wealth of each taxpayer, *post-mortem* inventories do not include the value of registered assets. Only if they are accompanied by auctions can we know their price.⁸

In general, historians use tax sources to study differentiation and quantify inequality, particularly wealth registers, which are very similar in north-central Italy, southern France and the Iberian Peninsula, where they are known as *estimi*, *livres d'estimes*, *compoix* and *cadastres*, *llibres d'estimes*, *valies* and *manifests* or *padrones de riqueza*, respectively.⁹ All of them, as well as the tax system that inspired them, are part of the same fiscal culture that was widespread in north-western Mediterranean countries, a fiscal system based on a direct proportional tax on each taxpayer's wealth, which required first and foremost the knowledge of assets and their fiscal assessment. The registers drawn up to ascertain the wealth of taxpayers and calculate their taxable base detail the assets of the inhabitants of each local community, both movable and immovable, while the tax censuses (*llibres de la peita* in the kingdom of Valencia) show how much they paid. This has made it possible to divide the population into deciles (usually ten), to calculate how much each decile had (in particular, the top 10% and even the top 5% and the top 1%) and to establish the Gini coefficient and other similar indexes, such as the Theil and Palma indexes.¹⁰ For Iberia, these wealth registers are generally available for the late Middle Ages, from the fourteenth century onwards. Exceptionally, however, we have two registers from the second half of the thirteenth century (1244 and 1266) for the Navarrese locality of Olite, published more than forty years ago.¹¹

However, it is possible to use other types of sources, of a non-fiscal nature, and to go further back in time. I refer mainly to the so-called *Llibres de repartiment* (in Catalan) / *Libros de repartimiento* (in Spanish), that is, 'distribution books', which record the allotted plots of land distributed to the settlers who went on to colonise the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula, taken

⁸ Moreno, "Els inventaris *post-mortem*," Almenar, "Los inventarios *post mortem*," Villanueva, Navarro, "Subastas y tasaciones de bienes."

⁹ Abbé, *Estimes, compoix et cadastres*; Furió, "Avant le cadastre;" Morelló, Turull, "Estimes-manifests;" Rigaudière, *De l'estime au cadastre*; Smurra, "Fiscal sources: the 'Estimi'."

¹⁰ It is probably Guido Alfani ("Economic inequality") and his team who have best and most finely applied these tools, in particular the Gini coefficient and the Lorenz curve, to the study of inequality in medieval and early modern Europe. For the Iberian Peninsula, see Furió *et al.*, "Measuring economic inequality;" García Montero, "Wealth inequality" and Morelló *et al.*, "A study of economic inequality."

¹¹ Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

from the Muslims. To better understand the process and the documentation it generated, it is worth making a comparison. Just as the Norman Conquest marks a turning point in the medieval history of England, the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval centuries is marked by the so-called *Reconquista*, the southward expansion of the Christian kingdoms of the north. To make the conquest irreversible, the military occupation was followed by the settlement of Christian immigrants who obtained the lands confiscated from the Muslims.¹²

The process of population transfer from north to south, from Galicia, Portugal, León, Castile, Navarre, Aragon and Catalonia to the Alentejo, Algarve, Andalusia, Murcia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, also had important demographic and social consequences. Unlike much of Western Europe, in the thirteenth century Iberia was not an overpopulated and demographically saturated territory; the move southwards acted as a safety valve, an outlet, while affecting the land/labour ratio. Land was abundant, as much of the peninsula, especially the central plateau, was empty and sparsely populated. And in regions conquered from the Muslims, cultivation was essentially reduced to irrigation, leaving large areas of dry land virtually uncultivated, while others were mainly dedicated to livestock farming, particularly after the reduction of the labour force that followed the Black Death. It must be insisted that, contrary to the claims of Robert Fossier and other historians for the core of Western Europe, the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century was not a full world (*un monde plein*) whose population growth had peaked, and therefore the neo-Malthusian explanations about the end of growth and the consequent crisis are not applicable. Iberia is, indeed, a good observatory to disprove these theses.

2. Three case-studies: Olite (13th c.), Oriola (14th c.) and Vera (15th c.)

For the purpose of this article, three observatories have been used, from the north to the southeast of the peninsula, at three different chronological moments: Olite, located in the middle of the kingdom of Navarre, in the mid-thirteenth century; Orihuela/Oriola, first in the kingdom of Murcia, within the Crown of Castile, and later incorporated into the kingdom of Valencia, in the Crown of Aragon, at the beginning of the fourteenth century; and Vera, first in the Nasrid sultanate of Granada and conquered and incorporated into Castile at the end of the fifteenth century (Figure 1).

The first one, Olite, seems to have been a Visigothic foundation – perhaps on an ancient Roman *oppidum* – in 621, as a fortification against the

¹² Among an abundant bibliography, see among others Virgili, *Conquesta i feudalització*; Torró, *El naixement d'una colònia*; González, “Colonización agraria;” Jover, Soto, “Colonización feudal.” On the *repartiments* in the Crown of Aragon, Guinot, Torró, *Repartiments*.



Figure 1. *Economic Inequality in Iberian Peninsula: case-studies (13th-15th c.)*
 Source: elaboration of the author.

Vascones (ancestors of the present-day Basques) occupied by the Muslims for three centuries, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, and documented as a modest village (*almunia*) of the Christian kingdom of Pamplona in 1086. It became more important as the border with Islam moved southwards; it was provided with a wall and obtained municipal laws (*fuero* of 1147) granted by royal privilege which favoured the installation of Frankish settlers from the other side of the Pyrenees. Proof of its growing prominence is the construction of a fortress in the thirteenth century, converted in the following two centuries into an imposing castle and one of the favourite residences of the kings of Navarre. In the mid-thirteenth century, it had more than a thousand families and, like other towns in Navarre, it enjoyed a certain fiscal autonomy that allowed it to collect direct taxes (*tailles*), attested to in Olite (1244), Estella (1258) and Pamplona (1287), the amount of which was calculated according to the wealth of the taxpayers (*por sueldo et por libra*).¹³

As for Oriola, although its foundation by the Romans is debatable, there is no doubt of its existence in Visigothic times, since its *dux* Teodomir surrendered the city to the Muslim conquerors in 713. Five centuries later, in 1243, it would be conquered again, this time by the Christians, and incorporated into the kingdom of Castile. Sixty years later, in 1304, it passed into the Crown of

¹³ Carrasco, "Fiscalidad y finanzas."

Aragon, annexed to the kingdom of Valencia, in which it would form a governorate of its own. Its population at the beginning of the fourteenth century, which is the time that interests us in our analysis, would also have been over a thousand hearths or heads of families (not inhabitants). Finally, Vera, near to which was located the ancient Punic and Roman colony of Baria, abandoned in the sixth and seventh centuries, and whose territory formed part of the Visigothic duchy of the aforementioned Teodomir of Oriola, was under Muslim domination for almost eight centuries, until it was taken by Ferdinand the Catholic in 1488. The approximately 600 residents who lived there before the Christian conquest were replaced by only 120 colonists, mostly from the neighbouring kingdom of Murcia, although some of the expelled Muslims were resettled in a nearby village, Antas, and used as labourers. Almost thirty years later, in 1516, in order to boost the numbers of the population, a new *repartimiento* was carried out, and the following year there were 152 neighbours or families. However, a powerful earthquake in 1518 killed between 140 and 150 people and destroyed all the houses (about 200), many to the foundations, forcing the city to be rebuilt.¹⁴

Fiscal sources have been used for the first case, while for the other two the respective books of *repartimiento* have been employed. For the first observatory, the town of Olite, three tax records from the mid-thirteenth century have been preserved, which are exceptional not only for the town itself but also for a large part of Western Europe, where, save for north-central Italy and Languedoc, there is no evidence of such old fiscal documents. Regardless of whether the fiscal system, royal or municipal, was based on direct or indirect taxes or a mixture of both, varying from one city to another, the former could be capitation taxes for which everyone subject to them had to pay exactly the same amount of money, or proportional to their wealth. For this it was necessary to know the assets of each taxpayer and to calculate their economic value. The assessed value of a taxpayer's total assets constituted the taxable base on which the tax was levied, or on which the tax burden imposed on a town or a village was distributed among all its inhabitants. Outside Italy, this system, known as *per solidum et libram*, is documented in the towns of Languedoc from the mid-twelfth century, in northern France from the end of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and in Catalonia from the beginning of the thirteenth century.¹⁵ In Navarre, it was also at the beginning of the thirteenth century when some royal privileges (*fueros*) established that the *pecha* or lump sum – soon to be called *talla* – assigned to a town or council was to be distributed in proportion to the movable and immovable property of each inhabitant. The three fiscal documents that have been preserved for the Navarrese town of Olite, a register of estimates of assets and two tax

¹⁴ Luque de Haro, Caparrós, *La Tierra de Vera*.

¹⁵ Rigaudière, "Les origines médiévales;" Turull, "El impuesto directo."

registers with the amount to be paid by each taxpayer, also date from the middle of this century.

The oldest of the three, dated 1244, is entitled *Libro de cullita de toda la villa III meallas por libra*¹⁶ and contains the amounts to be paid by each inhabitant – a total of 1.098, grouped by quarters and streets. The second, from 1264, has a similar structure, although the taxpayers – in this case 1.092, although it does not seem that the book is complete – are not ordered topographically. And the third, also from 1264, consists of 1.109 entries, grouped by quarters, each with the inhabitant's name, the list of assets – movable goods (including capital, credits, merchandise, livestock, draught animals, work tools, furniture, clothes, jewellery and precious objects), houses, farmyards, threshing floors and land – that he owns or declares, the estimated value of each one and the sum of all the amounts consigned.¹⁷ The total value of land (irrigated land, dry land, vineyards, pastures, orchards) represents 43,26% of the declared assets (compared to 24,76% for movable goods and 31,98% for urban real estate), and constitutes the economic base of most taxpayers and practically all of them own at least one plot of land.¹⁸

Based on these two fiscal registers,¹⁹ Table 1A distributes the taxpayers of Olite into ten deciles, from lowest to highest level of wealth, for the years 1244 and 1264.²⁰

¹⁶ The *mealla* is half of a *dinero*, so a tax of 3 *meallas* per *libra* (pound; one *libra* contained 20 *sueldos*, or 240 *dineros* or 480 *meallas*) represented a levy of 0,625%.

¹⁷ The three texts were edited by Ricardo Ciérbide and studied in their economic and social aspects by José Ángel Sesma, who warned of the problems presented by the source – from the exempt population to the extent of fiscal fraud – which are general to this type of document, and which must be considered by the historians who use them. Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*, 19–20.

¹⁸ In his analysis of the document, Sesma divided the taxpayers into ten wealth groups, from those who had no assets to those who had property worth more than a thousand pounds, and calculated the percentage of the total wealth that corresponded to each, basically grouped into five broad categories: the poor (those without assets or valued at less than 5 pounds): 11,26% of taxpayers with only 0,24% of total wealth; low fortunes (between 5 and 25 pounds): 26,85% of taxpayers and 6,65% of total wealth; middle fortunes (between 25 and 100 pounds): 44,14% of taxpayers and 40,2% of total wealth; high fortunes (between 100 and 500 pounds): 16,12% of taxpayers and 45,13% of total wealth; the rich (over 500 pounds): 0,54% of taxpayers and 7,65% of total wealth; to which must be added 1,08% of taxpayers whose assets were not valued. Ciérbide, Sesma, 89–97.

¹⁹ In his detailed analysis of the structure of property in Olite, distinguishing between the different types of assets, Sesma uses the wealth register of 1264. On the contrary, in my study I rely on the two tax registers of 1244 and 1264, which only contain the overall amount to be paid by each taxpayer for all his assets. The difference in the use of one or the other source is because the purposes of the two approaches are also different. For the study of ownership, it is necessary to rely on wealth registers, while inequality can be analysed from tax registers.

²⁰ For ease of calculation, all amounts – which in the documents are expressed in *sueldos*, *dineros* and *meallas* – have been reduced to *dineros*.

Table 1A. *Distribution in Olite (13th c.): deciles*

Deciles	1244		1264	
	Tax burden in dineros	%	Tax burden in dineros	%
1	503,55	1	325,50	1
2	1.270,45	2	844,50	2
3	2.080,65	3	1.429,65	3
4	2.961,85	4	2.133,15	4
5	3.974,25	5	2.979,95	6
6	5.337,55	7	3.898,15	7
7	7.006,20	9	4.997,00	9
8	9.420,90	12	6.737,80	13
9	13.917,00	17	9.340,95	18
10	33.744,10	42	20.043,65	38
Top 5%		10,76		25,67
Top 1%		28,30		10,31

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

And what Table 1A shows is serious inequality: two deciles, the highest, nine and ten, own more than half of the total wealth (59% and 56%), while the lowest own just 6%, and the middle ones, four to eight, own only a little more than a third of the total. There is therefore no substantial and solid middle stratum, and the lower strata are very poor. Most of the wealth is concentrated in the top two deciles, and even the top 5% accumulate more than a quarter of the total. Next, Table 1B shows the number of taxpayers, the total tax burden, the average tax burden, the median tax burden, and different indexes both to test the proportionality of the fiscal system and of the data provided by the tax lists and to measure inequality.²¹

Table 1B. *Taxpayers, tax burden, indexes of inequality in Olite (13th c.)*

Year	Ta- xpayers	Total tax bur- den	Ave- rage tax bur- den	Me- dian tax bur- den	Fiscal dis- socia- tion	Top 10 %	Bot- tom 50 %	Q3/ Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1244	1.063	80.216,5	75,46	44,5	0,29	42	15	6,0	0,561	0,0849	4,9504
1264	1.067	52.730,3	49,42	32,5	0,25	38	16	6,5	0,532	0,0762	4,2351

Note: tax burden in *dineros*.

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

²¹ The number of taxpayers does not coincide exactly with those recorded in both registers, because entries containing no values and entries for juridical persons have been excluded; only natural persons have been considered.

Twenty years separate the two registers, in which time the metrics do not seem to have changed much. The number of taxpayers is practically the same, 1.060, although the tax burden is different in each year, and therefore both the average and the median are different, but this does not matter for our purposes here, as it is not taxation but inequality that is being analysed. Also different, although not much, are the results of the different inequality measures used derived from the two tax lists. But before examining them, it is worth considering the accuracy of the source in precisely capturing the diversity in wealth. Remember that assets were declared by their owners and assessed by local tax officials, who, as Thijs Lambrecht and Wouter Ryckbosch point out for the southern Low Countries in the fifteenth century, might have preferred “rough statements of worth [...] and probably much more pragmatically feasible, rather than very precise measurements of wealth based on actual quantitative data”.²² The tax was in principle proportional to the worth of the taxpayers’ assets, and each one had to pay a levy of 3 *meallas* per pound, i.e., a rate of 0,625%. But this does not necessarily mean that the system was entirely proportional or that the tax sources reflected differences in wealth perfectly. In the Iberian Peninsula and other European regions, taxpayers were clustered in fiscal categories (less than ten or even five in small communities and between twenty and twenty-five or even more in larger towns and villages in the southern Low Countries), in order to better reflect differences in wealth, and all taxpayers in the same category paid the same amount. Lambrecht and Ryckbosch have gone a step further by calculating an index of fiscal dissociation in order to test the extent to which late medieval fiscal data capture income diversity in a population. “This index expresses the ratio between (1) the number of fiscal categories used by the tax collectors, and (2) the number of taxpayers”. The result is always a value between 0 and 1, where 1 represents a situation of low fiscal clustering and high fiscal dissociation, and that would mean that the fiscal categories designed by the tax collectors have a strong tendency to capture income/wealth variation, while a value closer to 0 would indicate a greater degree of fiscal clustering, since more taxpayers with presumably larger variation in actual incomes would have been grouped in the same fiscal categories.²³ The more tax categories, the more accurate the results would be, although in general large settlements would be characterised by lower fiscal dissociation ratios (0,09 on average versus 0,15-0,36 in smaller communities, in the examples reported by both authors). In Olite the fiscal dissociation index was 0,29 in 1244 and 0,25 in 1264. These figures are close to each other and consistent with the inequality statistics shown in Table 1B.

The measurement most used in inequality studies is the Gini coefficient, which allows for both spatial and temporal comparison with other localities

²² Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, “Economic inequality.” I would also like to thank David Carvajal and Pere Verdés for their helpful discussions in this respect.

²³ Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, 211.

and other chronological points in time so that long-term trends can be reconstructed. Unfortunately, only the two tax lists mentioned above have been preserved for Olite, which limits the comparison to a short period of 20 years during which the Gini coefficient fell slightly from 0,561 in 1244 to 0,532 in 1264. Both their value and the trend they reflect appear strongly correlated with other measures of inequality. Firstly, the share of both the top 10% and the bottom 50%, and secondly, the ratio between the third quartile (Q3) and the first quartile (Q1), which makes it possible to overcome some problems associated with the Gini coefficient, which is insensitive to changes in the internal differences in the lower-middle strata of the population. In Olite we find relatively high inequality indexes (Gini above 0,5) with relatively high shares of the top 10% (the upper stratum, which owned 42% of the wealth in 1244 and 38% in 1264) and low shares of the bottom 50% (the poorest half of taxpayers, which owned only 15% and 16% of the wealth, respectively), while the relatively high Q3/Q1 ratios (4,1 in 1244 and 4,4 in 1264) are indicative of large differences within this part of the fiscal population, mirroring the inequality pointed out by the other two indicators.²⁴

Unlike the Gini coefficient, the Theil index is not a relative measure that can easily be compared across different distributions – it does not vary within specific boundaries, like 0 and 1 in the cases of Gini – and its interpretation is not intuitive, but its usefulness lies in its ability to correct the potential bias attributable to the wide range of variation in the number of taxpayers surveyed. It assesses to what extent the distribution deviates from perfect equality – no differences between taxpayers – by measuring the ratio between each data point and the mean of the distribution, multiplied by its natural logarithm. It thus returns a figure between zero and infinity, whereby a higher number stands for more inequality and the maximum is defined by the size of the population (i.e., the natural logarithm of the total number of observations). Measured with the Theil index, inequality in Olite was 0,0849 in 1244 and 0,0762 in 1264, showing a slight decrease that follows and confirms the same trend previously shown by the Gini coefficient.

Finally, and among a wide variety of indexes developed to measure inequality by overcoming the limitations of the Gini coefficient and better capturing its complexity, the Palma ratio – which uses the same data source as the Gini coefficient, based on deciles, but with a different methodology – measures the ratio between the wealth accumulated by the richest 10%, the top ten, and that held by the poorest 40%. In Palma's view, the problem with the Gini coefficient is that it gives a flat figure, which attempts to capture the inequality of a society as a whole but is very uninformative about what happens within that society, about where inequality is most pronounced. According to him, changes in inequality levels are never due to what happens in the middle strata – deciles five to nine – which accumulate half of the wealth in

²⁴ I follow in this paragraph the reasonings and proposals in Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, 217-8.

almost all societies, rich or poor (in Olite, in fact, 50% and 53% in the two chronological cuts), but to what happens with the other half, in particular what the richest 10% concentrates. In Olite the share of wealth of the top 10% almost quintuples that of the poorest 40%: 4,9504 in 1244 and 4,2351 in 1264, with a slight decrease between both years which matches that pointed out by the other indexes.

In short, and beyond this slight downward trend in which the different indexes coincide, the figures they all give show a significant, although not very high, inequality, which corresponds to a society in growth and transformation, with both a growing population and an increasingly diversified economy, in which land was not the only source of wealth, although it was the main one: 43,26% compared to 31,98% of urban real estate and 24,75% of movable goods, including merchandise, credit and capital – and its ownership was mostly (53,54%) in the hands of the richest stratum (16,66%).²⁵

Around the same time that the tax registers of Olite were being drawn up, the conquest and colonisation of the town of Oriola and its territory, in the southeast of the peninsula, was taking place. From 1243, for just over 20 years it was a Christian protectorate during which the local Islamic population continued to reside in the city. In 1264, after a Muslim uprising was crushed, Oriola passed into the kingdom of Castile, and immediately began expelling the indigenous inhabitants and expropriating their property, distributing the territory among the newly arrived Christian settlers. Between 1265 and 1314, six allocations were made, to which Juan Antonio Barrio has recently added a seventh, drawn up in 1330, after the composition of the so-called *Llibre dels repartiments* of Oriola, which is why it does not appear there.²⁶ The first two (1265-6 and 1268-72?) correspond to the distribution of the lands taken from the Muslims, the irrigated area – the *huerta* – closest to the city; the next two (1272-5) consist of revisions and extensions of the first two, on either side of the Segura river, while the last two (1288-96 and 1308-14) allocate the most distant and poorest-quality lands, next to swamps and marshlands, which had not been turned into plots or cultivated in the Islamic period. The first five were carried out while the city was under Castilian rule, while the sixth was made after Oriola had been incorporated into the Crown of Aragon. Since the *Libre dels repartiments* is a copy from the second or third decade of the fourteenth century, we cannot be sure that they are full transcriptions of the original registers; they could rather be summaries or partial selections, especially the older ones, while the more recent ones seem to be more complete. I will therefore rely mainly on the last one, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, for the analysis.

Such 'distribution books' were very common in the mid-thirteenth century, to organise the installation of Christian settlers and make the conquests

²⁵ Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*, 75 and 94.

²⁶ Barrio, "Un repartimiento inédito."

irreversible, and again at the end of the fifteenth century, during the seizure of the sultanate of Granada. Quite a few are preserved for both Castile (Andalusia and Murcia) and the Crown of Aragon (Mallorca and Valencia).²⁷ These are not, therefore, fiscal sources, like those seen for Olite, but registers of gifts of houses and land to newly arrived settlers so that they could set up home, put down roots and contribute to the formation and consolidation of a new Christian-feudal society. However, with due caution, these records can be used to study inequality, as has been done in England with the Domesday Book.²⁸

According to Juan Torres Fontes, editor of the *Llibre* of Oriola and one of its most important scholars, out of the 952,8 km² that the Lower Segura currently comprises, no less than 832 km² were allotted to the colonists who came to settle in the territory in the six successive distributions. This gives us an idea of both the extent of the distribution and the quality and appropriateness of the source. In the first allotment, carried out in 1266, 2.665 *tahullas*, i.e., about 300 hectares, were distributed among 691 settlers, the first to arrive. The majority, more than half of the beneficiaries, received 2 *tahullas*; a third of them, including small knights, clerics, and townsmen, were given between 3 and 4 *tahullas*, and a meagre 7%, made up of nobles, knights, squires and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was granted between 5 and 10 *tahullas*. As shown in Table 2, the result was that the more modest settlers, with between 2 and 4 *tahullas*, received more than 80% of the distributed land, while the upper stratum, with between 5 and 10 *tahullas*, received only 16,5%.²⁹

Table 2. *First distribution of Oriola (1266): land structure*

Distributed land		Settlers		Total land	
<i>tahullas</i>	ha.	n.	%	<i>tahullas</i>	%
2	0,22	420	60,78	840	40,61
3-4	0,33-0,44	224	32,41	887	42,89
5-10	0,56-1,118	47	6,80	341	16,48
Total		691	100	2.665 (290 ha.)	100

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, LIX-LX.

It should be remembered that the oldest partitions, such as this one, which is the first, are not recorded in full in the *Llibre de repartiments*, and that it is quite possible that they are summaries or partial transcriptions. For this reason, it is better to use the last partition, that of 1314, which seems more complete, and therefore the calculations that can be made from it will be more reliable. In this sixth partition, 30.863 *tahullas*, about 3.450 hectares, were distributed among a total of 1,292 settlers, with an average of 2,57 hectares

²⁷ González, "Repartimientos andaluces;" Guinot, Torr , *Repartiments a la Corona d'Arag *.

²⁸ Bekar, Reed, "Land market and inequality."

²⁹ Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*.

per family and a median of 2,2. Less than 50 years after the first partition, the distribution is much more unequal: half of the new settlers did not even receive 25% of the total allocated land, while the top two strata account for 44% (Tables 3A, 3B).

Table 3A. *Sixth distribution of Oriola (1308-14): deciles*

Deciles	Land in <i>tahullas</i>	%
1	341,2	1
2	487,8	2
3	1.344	4
4	2.588	8
5	2.588	8
6	2.854	9
7	3.235	10
8	3.831	12
9	4.158	13
10	9.436	31
Top 5%		28,3
Top 1%		20,9

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27.

Table 3B. *Settlers, land allocated, indexes of inequality in Oriola (1308-14)*

Year	Settlers	Total Land allocated	Average family land	Median family land	Fiscal dis-socialion	Top 10 %	Bottom 50 %	Q3/Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1308-14	1.292	30.863 t. 3.450 ha.	23,85 t. 2,57 ha.	20 t. 2,2 ha.	0,02	31	23	5,3	0,4073	0,0491	1,9819

Note: t.= *tahullas*; ha.= hectares.

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27.

Comparing these results (Tables 2, 3A, 3B) with those of Olite (Tables 1A, 1B), the Oriola partition shows a stratified society, although not as much as that of the Navarrese town, with a percentage of the top 10% lower and of the bottom 50% higher, and lower Gini and Theil indexes, but above all a Palma ratio in which the richest 10% barely doubles the poorest 40%, while in Olite it almost quintuples it.

Finally, the third case study is the town of Vera, in the kingdom of Granada, conquered by the Catholic Monarchs in 1488 and whose *Repartimiento*, compiled two years later, shows the first distribution of the lands confiscated from the Muslims among the new Christian settlers. A total of 6.339 *tahullas* (about 708 ha.) were distributed among 179 settlers. More than two-thirds of the newcomers, almost 70%, received less than one-third of the total land

allocated, while at the other extreme, just over 3% received more than 20% of the total, more than one-fifth. In between, the middle stratum (28%), with almost half of the land (47%), was far more substantial and solid than in Olite (see above the footnote 18) (Table 4A).³⁰

Table 4A. *Distribution of Vera (1490-1): land structure*

Distributed land		Settlers		Total land	
<i>tahullas</i>	ha.	n.	%	<i>tahullas</i>	%
< 10	< 1,18	39	21,78	119,25	1,88
11-30	1,29-3,54	84	46,92	1.947	30,71
31-60	3,65-7,08	36	20,11	1.890,5	29,82
61-100	7,19-11,80	14	7,82	1.085	17,11
101-150	11,91-17,70	3	1,67	349,5	5,51
> 150	> 17,70	3	1,67	948	14,95
Total	179	100	6.339,25	100	

Source: Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 30.

These data can be further refined by dividing them into deciles and calculating the different indexes (Tables 4B, 4C). First, the average size of the gifts is respectable, over 3 hectares, but the average and median are mirages or optical illusions, because the three lowest deciles received only 5% of the distributed land, 10% if the fourth decile is added. At the other extreme, the top two deciles account for almost half the land (46%), but the intermediate deciles, from five to eight, account for a similar percentage (44%), and if the fourth decile is added, they reach half (49%). In other words, there is a well-endowed middle stratum in Vera, which we should consider and not just look at the polarisation between the richest and the poorest. Yet the richest 10% of the population accounts for 27% of the land, while the poorest 50% account for less than 20%, percentages very close to those of Oriola's sixth partition, 180 years earlier. Also very similar, although slightly lower, are Vera's Gini coefficient and Theil index in relation to those of Oriola. On the contrary, the Palma ratio shows that while in Oriola the share of wealth of the top 10% was almost double that of the poorest 40%, in Vera it was almost two and a half times higher.

Table 4B. *Distribution of Vera (1490-1): deciles*

<i>Deciles</i>	Land in <i>tahullas</i>	%
1	3,60	0,07
2	77,65	1,47
3	206,70	3,92
4	288,20	5,46

³⁰ Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 30.

5	456,35	8,65
6	502,35	9,52
7	504,4	9,56
8	803,55	15,23
9	1.005,50	19,06
10	1.426,7	27,04
Top 5%		15,16
Top 1%		3,99

Note: data have been extracted directly from the *Repartimiento*, which explains the slight difference in the number of settlers and *tahullas* with Table 4B, created by Jiménez Alcázar.
Source: created by the author from Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122.

Table 4C. *Settlers, land allocated, indexes of inequality in Vera (1490-1)*

Year	Settlers	Total Land allocated	Average family land	Median family land	Fiscal dis-sociation	Top 10 %	Bottom 50 %	Q3/Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1490-91	172	5.275 t. 590 ha.	30,67 t. 3,35 ha.	29 t. 3,24 ha.	0,23	27	19,6	7,6	0,441	0,059	2,4763

Source: created by the author from Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122.

3. *Inequality before and after the Black Death*

The different indexes used in the previous section show that inequality was much higher in Olite in the mid-thirteenth century than in Oriola at the beginning of the fourteenth and in Vera at the end of the fifteenth. Unfortunately, we do not have more sources for each of the three observatories with which to establish trends, only isolated points in time. Moreover, the sources are not the same in all three cases. For Olite, two tax lists (very early ones, the oldest preserved for the Iberian Peninsula) have been used, which reflect the differences in tax burdens and fortunes in a community already long established, differences created by the influence of various factors, from the family structure and the inheritance system to the land market and others. Instead, in Oriola and Vera, the distribution of land among the settlers who arrived in the newly conquered and occupied territories has been used. They were new societies in the process of formation; they replaced the previous Muslim population, who were expelled and had their land seized, and their origins lie in a radical departure from the past with the distribution of the territory. On the other hand, the allocations – and the size of them – respond above all to the monarchs' interest in creating a stable society, not egalitarian, but stratified from the outset. In the course of time, both inheritance and the land market as well as demographic evolution would change this initial framework. But we do not have any other later reference against which to compare it.

Table 5. *The three case studies compared*

	Olite (1244)	Olite (1264)	Oriola (1308-14)	Vera (1490-1)
Taxpayers/settlers	1.063	1.067	1.292	172
D1	1	1	1	0,6
D2	2	2	2	1
D3	3	3	4	4
D4	4	4	8	5
D5	5	6	8	9
D6	7	7	9	10
D7	9	9	10	10
D8	12	13	12	15
D9	17	18	13	19
D10	43	38	31	27
Top 5%	28	25	28,3	15,2
Top 1%	10,7	10,3	20,9	3,99
Bottom 50%	15	16	23	19,6
Q3/Q1	6	6,5	5,3	7,6
Gini	0,561	0,532	0,407	0,441
Theil	0,849	0,762	0,491	0,591
Palma	4,9504	4,2351	1,9819	2,4763

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII* (Olite); Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27 (Oriola); Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122 (Vera).

Table 5 brings together the results from the four periods analysed in the three observatories. All the indexes point to inequality being much higher in Olite in the thirteenth century: the top two deciles concentrated 60% of the wealth in 1244 and 56% in 1264, while the poorest half owned only 15% and 16%. The Gini coefficient stood at 0,56 and 0,53 and the Palma ratio shows that the share of wealth accumulated by the richest 10% was five times and more than four times that owned by the poorest 40%. By contrast, in Oriola and Vera, the poorest half own a fifth or more of the total land distributed, the Gini coefficient is 0,4 or slightly more, the Palma ratio shows that the richest have twice as much or more than the poor, and the Q3/Q1 ratio is lower in Oriola than in Olite and Vera, and in the latter higher than in the other two. Notwithstanding that, the top 5% in Oriola owned the same as in Olite, but the top 1% owned twice as much, which means that, although Oriola was less stratified than Olite, logical, given that the former was a community in formation, while the latter had been established for a long time, its richest elites owned a higher share of the wealth – they had received more land in the allocation. The results for Vera on this point are less clear and conclusive.

The comparison clearly shows the differences between the three observatories at the various points in time. However, the data obtained cannot be strung together and used to establish long-term trends, as the sources and situations – demographic, economic, social, and even political – are very di-

verse. In the mid-thirteenth century, Olite was undergoing a process of demographic growth and economic and social development, and the fiscal sources show the tax burden on the wealth of the taxpayers, while in Oriola and Vera the aim was to encourage the arrival of new inhabitants to fill the vacuum caused by the expulsion of the previous ones, whether in the second half of the thirteenth century, the first half of the fourteenth century or at the end of the fifteenth century. It was about creating a new society from scratch, on the *tabula rasa* prompted by the conquest and colonisation, still with few internal differences, especially among the bulk of the population, but with clearly defined – and endowed with greater land allocations – social and economic top hierarchies.

Nor are there many localities that have fiscal sources, or of any other nature, that can be used to analyse inequality, before or after the Black Death. Even fewer have been studied. There is only one survey of Tortosa by Laura Miquel and Jordi Morelló based on tax records and published in this same volume, which shows that, although the number of taxpayers fell by more than a quarter (almost 26%) and total wealth by 14,5% between 1316 and 1353, i.e., thirty years before and five years after the Black Death, even though the Gini coefficient (from 0,72 to 0,76), the Palma ratio (from 18,86 to 24) and the share of wealth of the top 10% (from 58,08 to 63,85) rose, did so slightly.³¹ On the other hand, based also on fiscal sources (tax lists and wealth registers), Laura Miquel and Pere Verdés have been able to study in great detail the evolution of inequality in the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century in two other cities of Catalonia. In Cervera, the Gini coefficient rose from 0,56 in 1421 to 0,59 in 1430 and 1450, 0,62 in 1476, 0,63 in 1492, 0,64 in 1518 and 0,65 in 1541, while in Igualada it remained at 0,56 (with slight variations) between 1412 and 1460, falling to 0,47 in 1475, rising to 0,53 in 1484, falling to 0,44 in 1503, rising to 0,54 in 1521 and falling again to 0,33 in 1537. A less linear and less clear evolution than in Cervera, where the authors attribute the increase in inequality in the second half of the fifteenth century to the impact of the Catalan civil war (1462-72), while in Igualada, on the contrary, the war would have determined a decreasing trend. Both towns, however, would see a rise in poverty, whether measured by the reduction in the share of wealth of the lower deciles or by the Palma ratio.³²

The data provided by these authors, as well as those contributed in this article and those already published in previous studies,³³ have been brought together in Figure 2, which summarises what we know so far about inequality in the Iberian Peninsula from the thirteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century, measured using the Gini coefficient, which allows comparisons between very different places and periods.

³¹ See the chapter by Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget in this volume.

³² Miquel, Verdés, "Contribución."

³³ Furió *et al.*, "Measuring economic inequality."

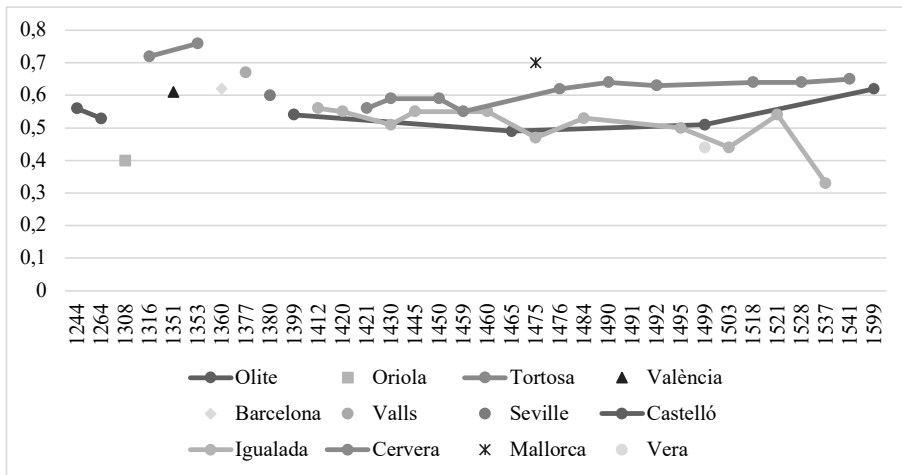


Figure 2. *Economic Inequality in Iberian Peninsula (13th-16th c.)*

Source: Furió et alii, "Measuring economic inequality."

The graph first shows three levels of inequality. The lowest (0,40 and 0,44) corresponds to communities in formation (Oriola, Vera), true frontier societies, where a new Christian population has replaced the previous Muslim one, and where, despite the lower inequality, stratification is present from the beginning, in the very unevenness of the allocations. At an intermediate level (just over 0,5) are villages and towns with a population of less than 1,500 hearths (Olite, Igualada, Cervera) and where the majority of the inhabitants, two thirds of the total population (Castelló) were peasants, while in large cities inequality was higher (above 0,6 and even 0,7). The larger the city, the greater the inequality. In the graph, it can be seen that the highest points correspond to the major cities, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, and Mallorca. To these we must add Tortosa, with a population of around 2.000 hearths (some 10.000 people), which is the locality with the greatest inequality (above 0,7 before the Black Death and close to 0,8 after it) and Valls, with a high index, close to 0,7, although it is not a very large town. On the other hand, although the data are still too isolated and relate to a specific location at a precise point in time, when put together in a graph some trends can be perceived, such as the increase in inequality before the Black Death and in the years immediately following, when its effects have not yet been deeply felt; the decrease in it from the last quarter of the fourteenth century until the mid-fifteenth century, and again the increase with the demographic upturn (with some exceptions, such as Igualada, where the rise started earlier, in the third decade of the fifteenth century, and a rare and possibly mistakenly based fall in the sixteenth century, at a time when all indexes point to a sharp increase in inequality). However, the trends are not automatic and do not correspond exactly to the movement of population and wages. Population numbers fall and wages

rise immediately after 1348, but the economic recession and the reduction in inequality only occur several decades later, at the end of the fourteenth century, while the resumption of the increase in inequality does seem to be more in line with the demographic and economic recovery in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

4. *A few final remarks*

In the Iberian Peninsula, the study of inequality in the late Middle Ages cannot be dissociated from the great territorial expansion of the Christian kingdoms over Muslim al-Andalus in the thirteenth century, the misnamed 'Reconquest', and the consequent divergence between the more populated north and the south, where a frontier society – made up of settlers from the north and more dynamic – was maintained for a longer period, until the beginning of the fourteenth century. After the Black Death, however, whose effects were felt as severely as in the rest of Western Europe, Iberia experienced the same demographic, economic and social evolution as the rest of the continent, with the sole exception of the kingdom of Granada, conquered at the end of the fifteenth century and where a new process of colonisation took place, represented in this study by the case of Vera. Population was undoubtedly a very important factor – the more people there were, the smaller the peasant holdings – but not the only one, as at the same time a process of land accumulation and concentration took place that deepened the internal differences among peasants, and between them and urban landowners. By this I mean that, on the one hand, population decline due to the plague and crises reduced inequality by wiping out smaller farms and benefiting the survivors by raising agricultural profits. On the other hand, land was concentrated in large farms and wages were not the main component of peasants' incomes. No peasant worked every day for a wage. Moreover, alongside the rate of population growth or decline other factors such as the technical level of agricultural production (irrigation, crop rotation, fertilisers, fallow land), the family structure, the inheritance system, the customs and practices of peasant communities, the commercialisation of the economy and the land market, as well as the demands (rents, taxes) made on the peasant economy by non-producers (kings, lords, the Church, city councils and other public authorities) were equally decisive. The cases examined in this study are just a few examples that will have to be supplemented with many more in further research to provide a far more complete picture of economic inequality and its evolution in Iberia in the late Middle Ages.

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Crisi demografica e rapporti di lavoro: la modificazione dei contratti agrari e della vita contadina nella Romagna dei secoli XIV-XV

di Massimo Montanari

L'abbandono dei contratti agrari a lungo termine, praticamente vitalizi ed ereditari, caratteristici dell'alto Medioevo, e l'affermarsi dei contratti di mezzadria a breve termine, espressione di un diverso rapporto fra proprietari e contadini, improntato a un maggiore controllo del lavoro e a una maggiore pesantezza di imposizioni e prelievi, avvenne fra XIII e XV secolo in modo progressivo e faticoso, data la vischiosità della consuetudine e degli usi tradizionali. Il crollo demografico del Trecento comportò una generale revisione dei rapporti economici e sociali, favorendo e accelerando questo passaggio. Il fenomeno fu sostenuto dalla legislazione cittadina, che tutelava gli interessi dei proprietari. L'esempio della Romagna, che qui si analizza, fu comune a varie aree dell'Italia centro-settentrionale.

The abandonment of the long-term agricultural contracts, practically lifelong and hereditary, characteristic of the early Middle Ages, and the emergence of short-term *mezzadria* (sharecropping), the expression of a different relationship between landlords and peasants, characterized by greater control of work and a greater burden of impositions and levies, took place between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries in a progressive and laborious way, given the tenacity of custom and traditional use. The demographic collapse of the fourteenth century led to a general revision of economic and social relations, which favoured and accelerated this transition. This phenomenon was supported by urban legislation that protected the interests of the landowners. The example of Romagna, analyzed here, was common to several areas of central-northern Italy.

Medioevo, crisi del Trecento, Romagna, contadini, legislazione cittadina, mezzadria.

Middle Ages, crisis of the 14th century, Romagna, peasantry, urban legislation, sharecropping.

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1. *L'evoluzione dei contratti agrari nel pieno e basso Medioevo: dal livello alla mezzadria*

Riprendo qui un argomento che ho trattato anni fa, quello dei contratti agrari e della loro trasformazione nell'Italia del pieno e basso Medioevo.¹ L'area che ho studiato è stata la Romagna. Il motivo per cui ho pensato di riproporre l'argomento nel quadro di questo convegno è che anche la crisi economica e demografica del Trecento, prima e dopo la Peste Nera, può aiutarci a spiegare la trasformazione dei contratti agrari, con la progressiva scomparsa dei contratti di livello (tipici dell'alto Medioevo) e il progressivo imporsi dei contratti mezzadrili.

Il livello è un tipo di contratto che si qualifica anzitutto per la lunga durata, solitamente ventinove anni. Si diffonde in epoca carolingia, parallelamente alla diffusione del sistema curtense.² Coincidenza non casuale, perché proprio il contratto di livello (come sostenne Vito Fumagalli) fu uno dei principali strumenti di affermazione della grande proprietà organizzata secondo il modello curtense: esso fu utilizzato per assorbire all'interno delle proprietà signorili aziende di piccoli coltivatori, già indipendenti, giuridicamente liberi e perciò legati al *dominus* non da un rapporto servile ma da un contratto scritto.³

In Romagna, il contratto di livello con coltivatori compare nella seconda metà del IX secolo, più tardi che nel resto dell'area padana e toscana. La sfasatura cronologica è dovuta al ritardo con cui il sistema curtense – strettamente legato all'esperienza economica carolingia – prese avvio nella *Romania* di tradizione bizantina e poi esarcale, più a lungo legata a modelli fondiari di tradizione romana. A questa diversità di tradizioni economico-politiche si deve anche la diversità dei canoni fondiari, che in Romagna oscillano da un quinto a un decimo del raccolto, mentre nelle altre zone dell'Italia settentrionale normalmente sono di un terzo.⁴

Significative novità si osservano tra XII e XIII secolo.⁵ All'interno dei livelli tradizionali affiorano elementi nuovi, che più tardi ritroveremo, in maniera più organica e compiuta, nei contratti mezzadrili. In primo luogo, il canone della metà: *medietatem omnium fructuum*, senza più distinzioni fra coltura e coltura come era tipico dei livelli tradizionali. In secondo luogo, norme sulla fornitura della semente: non sempre esse prevedono la compartecipazione a metà del proprietario (come avverrà nella mezzadria che si è definita 'classica') perché non di rado si precisa che l'obbligo della semente spetta interamente al colono. Tuttavia, il fatto stesso che il problema venga posto è

¹ Montanari, "Dal livello alla mezzadria." A questo lavoro rimando per riferimenti documentari e bibliografici più dettagliati rispetto a quelli, più sintetici, che presento in questa sede.

² Andreolli, Montanari, *L'azienda curtense in Italia*, 85 sgg.

³ Fumagalli, *Terra e società nell'Italia padana*, 141-2.

⁴ Fumagalli, "La tipologia dei contratti d'affitto con coltivatori."

⁵ Montanari, "Espansione dell'agricoltura," 46-7.

indicativo di nuove possibilità di gestione fondiaria, che si affacciavano allora per la prima volta all'attenzione dei proprietari. Entrambi gli elementi – il canone più pesante, la fornitura della semente – rimandano a un atteggiamento nuovo nei confronti della terra, a una concezione della proprietà come investimento e fonte di profitto, confermata dalla presenza, nuova anch'essa, di precise direttive riguardanti le colture, i tipi di lavoro da svolgere, i tempi e le modalità con cui farlo. Tale non era l'atteggiamento degli antichi proprietari, attenti solo a riscuotere il canone e a ribadire il controllo fisico sulle persone dei coloni. Questi elementi di novità – che in qualche modo richiamano i contratti mezzadrili – hanno fatto coniare un'espressione, 'livelli mezzadrili', che è tuttavia ambigua e sostanzialmente contraddittoria, quasi un ossimoro,⁶ perché nei livelli manca un elemento che sarà decisivo nella futura mezzadria, quello della breve durata del contratto, strumento essenziale per un controllo della terra non più basato sul potere, sul controllo fisico delle persone, bensì sulla redditività economica, sul profitto. Ciò nasceva da una cultura diversa, soprattutto cittadina, soprattutto laica.⁷

La 'filosofia' mezzadrile (chiamiamola così) era strutturalmente estranea a quella del livello e, nonostante ogni tentativo di innesto, i due modelli rimanevano incompatibili. Soprattutto, come ho detto, era incompatibile la logica della lunga durata, che, nei contratti di livello, prevedeva anche la possibilità di rinnovo e di trasmissione agli eredi: di fatto, se non di diritto, il livello garantiva alla famiglia contadina un possesso vitalizio ed ereditario della terra. La lunga durata del rapporto di lavoro, cardine della contrattualistica agraria altomedievale, aveva la sua ragion d'essere in un contesto storico segnato dal progressivo avanzamento delle colture, da un'agricoltura 'di conquista' che richiedeva tempi lunghi.⁸ Al contrario, la nuova mentalità economica voleva tempi brevi in vista di una gestione dinamica, di un controllo reale della terra, dei cicli produttivi, del lavoro dei contadini.⁹ Fu per questa sostanziale incompatibilità che l'esperimento dei 'livelli mezzadrili' non funzionò.

Essi si rivelarono un fallimento, ma restano per noi la spia di un nuovo modo di impostare i rapporti di lavoro che andava diffondendosi. Se nei secoli XII-XIII il canone della metà e la compartecipazione del proprietario alla fornitura della semente potevano fare la loro comparsa in contratti di tipo tradizionale, è ragionevole dedurre che quel modello di rapporti di lavoro fosse già presente nelle campagne romagnole. Gianfranco Pasquali ha sostenuto, a ragione, che esistevano in forma non scritta, come patti orali.¹⁰ Lo si deduce dagli stessi contratti di livello, alcuni dei quali prevedono la possibilità che il

⁶ Per il carattere 'ibrido' di queste forme contrattuali: Fumagalli, "L'evoluzione dell'economia agraria e dei patti colonici," 468-9.

⁷ Cherubini, *Signori, contadini, borghesi*, 73 sgg.

⁸ Grossi, "Problematica strutturale dei contratti agrari."

⁹ L'importanza del breve termine contrattuale come elemento qualificante dei rapporti di lavoro 'moderni' è stata sottolineata da Giorgetti, *Contadini e proprietari*, 144-8, 161 ("Le premesse medievali dei contratti agrari italiani").

¹⁰ Pasquali, "Contratti agrari scritti e rapporti di lavoro sommersi."

concessionario faccia lavorare da altri il terreno, subaffittandolo *contractu medietatis*.

Nella seconda metà del Duecento gli statuti di Ravenna distingueranno i *rustici* in tre categorie, a seconda che conducano i terreni *ad medietatem*, *ad teraticum* o *ad fictum*, ossia: a mezzadria, a canone parziario di entità diversa dalla metà (cioè, in pratica, a livello) o a canone fisso. Una quarta modalità, detta *ad insignale* o *ad scarsum*, consiste nella corresponsione di una quota fissa di prodotti a titolo semplicemente ricognitivo, per l'uso di piccoli terreni o di sedimi abitati.¹¹

A me sembra significativo che in questa enumerazione di possibili patti di lavoro il rapporto *ad medietatem* sia citato per primo. Questa mi sembra una scelta politica. Dagli stessi Statuti ravennati emerge infatti la volontà del ceto dirigente cittadino di incoraggiare *quel* tipo di patti agrari, nei limiti del possibile e nel rispetto dei diritti consuetudinari. In un'altra rubrica, dedicata al caso di quei contadini che cessano il rapporto di lavoro *se renovare nolentes*, si precisa che il proprietario potrà cedere la terra a un nuovo coltivatore mantenendo anche con lui i patti precedenti, sia mezzadrili, sia a livello, sia a canone fisso, sia *ad scarsum*. Ma poi si aggiunge *quod dominus vel domina possit reducere terram datam ad terraticum et ad fictum, seu scarsum, si voluerit ad medietatem*. Se vuole (*si voluerit*) il proprietario può introdurre un rapporto mezzadrile nuovo, 'convertendo' il vecchio contratto.¹² Tale licenza, che è, sotto sotto, un invito, non stupisce: anche in Romagna, come altrove, i rapporti mezzadrili sono un tipico prodotto della società e della cultura cittadina, di un ceto urbano di proprietari più attenti di quanto non fossero gli antichi signori a far fruttare la terra e il lavoro dei contadini.

Allo stesso tempo, la norma degli Statuti ravennati testimonia la grande vischiosità dei rapporti di lavoro, che tendevano a cristallizzarsi e a perpetuarsi di generazione in generazione, secondo una prassi consolidata. Da questo punto di vista è significativo che la possibilità di convertire vecchi contratti in contratti *ad medietatem* sia prevista nella rubrica che riguarda *nuovi* coloni, insediati al posto di gente che per qualche motivo se ne è andata dal fondo.

La vischiosità dei rapporti di lavoro, e la difficoltà di introdurre rapporti di tipo nuovo, trovano riscontro nella documentazione privata. A titolo di sondaggio ho compiuto un esame della contrattualistica agraria faentina,¹³ constatando che i contratti *ad medietatem*, fra XII e XIII secolo, sono quasi tutti stipulati quando sia presente una di queste due condizioni, o entrambe:

1. il contadino riceve in locazione il terreno per la prima volta (cioè non si tratta di un rinnovo);

¹¹ *Statuto del secolo XIII*, 36 (r. 33).

¹² *Statuto del secolo XIII*, 39 (r. 38).

¹³ Queste e le successive valutazioni sono basate su ricerche di gruppo da me effettuate assieme ad allievi e allieve nel corso di seminari e tesi di laurea, puntualmente menzionate nel saggio (citato alla nota 1) di cui questo lavoro ripropone le conclusioni. In particolare, per il territorio faentino, qui utilizzato come campione, rimando alle tesi di R. Argnani e M. G. Attanasio.

2. il terreno è totalmente o parzialmente incolto, e il contadino vi entra per metterlo a coltura.

Dunque, si tratta sempre di un nuovo concessionario, vuoi perché questo si è sostituito a un altro (è il caso previsto dagli Statuti ravennati) vuoi perché il terreno è occupato e lavorato per la prima volta. Uomini nuovi, terre nuove: quasi solamente in questi casi avveniva di instaurare rapporti di tipo nuovo, di natura tendenzialmente mezzadrile.

La difficoltà di instaurare rapporti di lavoro di tipo nuovo può spiegare la lentezza con cui questi tardano ad affacciarsi nella documentazione; nel XIII secolo essi costituiscono una ristretta minoranza rispetto al numero complessivo dei contratti con coltivatori. Anni fa avevo verificato la cosa sul territorio faentino: su un centinaio di patti agrari del XIII secolo, appena il 13% sono *ad medietatem*; il 5% sono gli affitti; la stragrande maggioranza, l'82%, è ancora costituita da livelli. La percentuale di questi ultimi è certamente sovrastimata, sia per la presenza (sottolineata da Pasquali) di contratti stipulati solo oralmente, sia, forse, perché le vicende documentarie sono solite penalizzare gli archivi dei proprietari laici rispetto a quelli delle comunità religiose – e i contratti *ad medietatem* sono per lo più stipulati da laici.

2. La crisi del XIV secolo e il successo del contratto di mezzadria

Difficile è una valutazione del fenomeno nel XIV secolo, quando la documentazione subisce un vero e proprio crollo. Ma tutto lascia credere che la stessa crisi del XIV secolo abbia accelerato i processi di trasformazione che sto cercando di descrivere. Quando, nel XV secolo, una documentazione consistente ricomincia ad apparire, il contratto mezzadrile è ormai saldamente impiantato nelle campagne romagnole. Che si tratti di un fenomeno tipicamente laico è di nuovo evidente: nel Faentino, scelto anche in questo caso come zona-campione, *tutti* i livelli del periodo 1401-50, tranne uno, sono stipulati da ecclesiastici (32 documenti); *tutti* i patti mezzadrili, tranne due, sono stipulati da laici (51 documenti). La cosa difficile da appurare è se tale situazione – che sul piano documentario rappresenta uno spettacolare rivolgimento rispetto alla situazione duecentesca – derivi da una effettiva ristrutturazione dei rapporti di lavoro nelle campagne, seguita alla destabilizzazione della proprietà fondiaria che accompagna la crisi del Trecento; o se non si tratti, più semplicemente, di un 'apparire' documentario della proprietà laica e dei patti mezzadrili, prima 'sommersi' nel non-scritto. Forse sono vere entrambe le cose. È vero che gli archivi notarili, nel Quattrocento, ci hanno conservato una massa documentaria assai più consistente sulla proprietà laica; ma è anche probabile che lo sconvolgimento economico e sociale del XIV secolo sia stata un' 'occasione' che i proprietari – laici e non solo – non si fecero sfuggire. La necessità, in tanti casi, di ricominciare da capo l'opera di colonizzazione agraria dovette favorire il ricambio degli usi, il rinnovo della consuetudine, l'imposizione di metodi nuovi di gestione della terra. La crisi demografica

dovette conferire alla manodopera contadina una mobilità inconsueta, e ai proprietari possibilità nuove di controllo e disponibilità della forza-lavoro. Come se, dopo lo sconvolgimento a metà del Trecento, si fosse riprodotta su grande scala, su scala per così dire globale, strutturale, la situazione che prima si realizzava sporadicamente, a sollecitare la comparsa dei nuovi rapporti di lavoro: terre nuove, uomini nuovi... A questa trasformazione dei sistemi di gestione economica si accompagnò la ricomposizione della proprietà fondiaria – il ben noto fenomeno dell’‘appoderamento’. Lo notò anche Anton Ivan Pini, per il territorio bolognese: la crisi successiva alla peste “accelerò il fenomeno dell’accorpamento delle unità poderali di base”.¹⁴

Nel Quattrocento, in Romagna, i contratti *ad laborandum ad medietatem fructuum* non hanno ancora assunto la complessità di contenuti che sarà propria della mezzadria moderna. Gli interventi del proprietario sono ancora limitati, limitata è la casistica delle norme, delle disposizioni, degli obblighi. Tuttavia, è scomparsa, ormai definitivamente, l’ambiguità che per lungo tempo aveva fatto coesistere – sia nei ‘livelli mezzadrili’ del XII-XIII secolo, sia nei contratti *ad laborandum* – nuovi criteri di gestione e lunga scadenza contrattuale. Il breve termine ormai si è affermato come standard: nel Faentino, la durata dei contratti *ad medietatem* del XV secolo, quando specificata, è quasi sempre di un solo anno; altrove si tratta di tre, cinque anni. La mobilità della manodopera agricola è ormai una realtà diffusa, e la legislazione cittadina si preoccupa di tutelare la piena disponibilità della terra da parte dei proprietari. Una rubrica degli Statuti di Faenza del 1414 consente di stipulare patti per la concessione di un terreno prima ancora che siano scaduti quelli in vigore, e al *dominus* si dà licenza di *expellere* il contadino dal fondo anche prima che il contratto sia scaduto, se solo c’è il sospetto di una sua negligenza o frode.¹⁵ È una situazione antitetica a quella prospettata dai contratti a lungo termine dell’alto Medioevo, che neppure in caso di inadempimento consentivano di cacciare il colono dal fondo, limitandosi a punirlo con una multa preservando l’integrità del contratto e il diritto/dovere di risiedere sulla terra.¹⁶ A metà del Quattrocento, una rubrica dei nuovi Statuti di Ravenna elaborati sotto il dominio veneto *proibisce* di stipulare contratti di lavoro di durata superiore a cinque anni.¹⁷ È in qualche modo l’epilogo di questa storia.

¹⁴ Pini, “Forme di conduzione,” 271.

¹⁵ *Statuta civitatis Faventiae*, 225-6.

¹⁶ Una volta pagata la pena pecuniaria, il contratto *in sua permaneant firmitate*: è clausola ricorrente nei livelli altomedievali: Andreolli, Montanari, *L’azienda curtense*, 93-4.

¹⁷ *Statuto Veneto*, 114 (d. II, r. 12): *quod nulla possessio concedi possit ad laborandum ultra quinque annos*.

3. Dalla cultura del dominio a quella del profitto: un 'modello' nuovo di contadino

Come furono vissuti, percepiti, rappresentati questi cambiamenti? Il punto di vista dei proprietari cittadini appare con chiarezza nei testi letterari e negli Statuti. Ciò che vi domina è – col desiderio di cambiare le cose – un sentimento di preoccupazione, perché i contadini potrebbero opporre resistenza. Non dico i braccianti, che sempre più numerosi appaiono in questo periodo, testimoniando una crescente differenziazione sociale nelle campagne. Di loro però non si parla quasi mai. Si parla invece dei mezzadri, installati nelle nuove unità poderali, cellule-base della 'cultura del profitto' che nelle campagne va imponendosi sulla 'cultura del potere', declinandola in modo diverso. Questi mezzadri costituiscono la fascia privilegiata del mondo contadino – hanno una terra, una famiglia, degli animali, a volte dei braccianti a servizio – ma si sentono schiacciati da rapporti di lavoro più esosi, che li costringono a spendere ogni energia all'interno del podere, senza (tendenzialmente) poterne uscire. L'uso collettivo dei boschi, dei pascoli, delle acque aveva costituito per secoli un collante decisivo della solidarietà sociale, oltre che un'essenziale risorsa economica, con significativi riscontri sul piano alimentare. Questo mondo, se resiste nelle aree di montagna, va scomparendo nelle campagne di pianura e di prima collina. Ma la volontà dei proprietari di dar forma a un modello nuovo di contadino, a un'idea nuova di contadino, isolato dalla comunità e concentrato nelle attività interne al suo podere, a fare il *contadino* e basta, a puntare ormai quasi solo sui prodotti della terra per la sua alimentazione,¹⁸ non deve essersi affermata troppo facilmente. Ecco perché gli Statuti insistono in maniera ossessiva su questi temi, a sostegno e garanzia delle clausole previste nei contratti agrari. Lo strumento legislativo tutela e protegge i diritti dei proprietari – di quelli dei contadini non c'è traccia. Quello che si mette in moto è un meccanismo coerente di sfruttamento della manodopera rurale. I mezzadri devono lavorare solo nel podere che hanno in concessione. Devono svolgere con estrema cura le opere di manutenzione. Devono arare la terra il numero di volte indicato nei contratti. Devono lavorare *prout quilibet bonus laborator facere debet*.¹⁹

Mi è già capitato di insistere su questa figura del 'buon lavoratore', un modello di buon comportamento che non ha nulla di astratto né di soggettivo: esso rimanda, in modo concreto e oggettivo, a tutta la serie di norme che i contratti agrari stabiliscono come obblighi per il contadino. Il contadino è *bonus laborator* nella misura in cui si conforma a ciò che il proprietario della terra esige da lui.²⁰ Attraverso le norme statutarie, è il potere pubblico a co-

¹⁸ Montanari, "Immagine del contadino," 204-5.

¹⁹ Così (un esempio fra i tanti) nella legislazione di San Marino: *Leges statutae Reipublicae Sancti Marini*, 108. Oltre che nelle fonti statutarie, l'espressione si trova nei contratti di mezzadria: alcuni esempi in Imberciadori, *Mezzadria classica toscana*, 88, 103.

²⁰ Montanari, "La città e i contadini," 128.

stringerlo; ogni negligenza sarà sanzionata per legge. Par quasi che il contadino sia diventato un pubblico dipendente. Non per nulla gli Statuti ravennati (dal XIII al XV secolo) prevedono un apposito *sacramentum sequimenti rusticorum*, un giuramento che i responsabili delle circoscrizioni rurali devono prestare davanti al podestà, a nome dei contadini tutti.²¹ Gli impegni sono descritti con minuzia di particolari, a cominciare dall'obbligo di privilegiare il lavoro nella proprietà del *dominus* rispetto a qualsiasi altro. E ovviamente di non imbrogliare nella divisione del raccolto. Questa è davvero un'ossessione: che il contadino possa rubare. Ed è sostanzialmente una novità rispetto alle immagini del contadino trasmesse dalla letteratura dei secoli precedenti: immagini che lo rappresentano bestiale, ignorante, immorale, ricettacolo di ogni vizio – ma difficilmente sotto specie di ladro. Il contadino ladro è invece immagine prevalente nella letteratura (italiana) del Tre-Quattrocento, che si rispecchia perfettamente nelle attenzioni della documentazione statutaria e della contrattualistica. È una declinazione soprattutto *cittadina* e soprattutto *economica* della cosiddetta 'satira del villano', tipica del basso Medioevo italiano.²² Declinazione che implica un'idea diversa dell'alterità contadina, attenta, come ho già detto, al profitto più che al dominio sulle persone.

L'ossessione padronale per il furto contadino, su cui Gabriella Piccinni si è lungamente soffermata,²³ può essere il punto di partenza per mettere a fuoco, nella parte sociale opposta, un atteggiamento, un 'sentire' che dovette profondamente attecchire fra i contadini dell'epoca – in quella fascia particolare di contadini che erano i mezzadri. Il furto è la traduzione concreta di questo sentire, la forma più semplice di resistenza alle modificazioni, percepite e vissute con disagio, che stavano avvenendo nei rapporti di lavoro e nei modelli di vita.

²¹ *Statuto del secolo XIII*, 33-5 (r. 31).

²² Montanari, "La satira del villano."

²³ Piccinni, "Il conflitto sociale nelle aree mezzadrili." Allo stesso modo, ladra sarà la contadina: Piccinni, "Le donne nella mezzadria toscana."

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III

Perceptions, representations and responses

Linguaggi teologico-politici della disegualianza e rivoluzione economica (1270-1350)

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L'epoca della cosiddetta 'rivoluzione economica medievale' (XII-XIV secolo) è anche l'epoca della formazione e della diffusione di linguaggi teologici, economici e politici che analizzano, interpretano e giudicano la situazione sociale e di mercato. Questo sistema discorsivo, fatto di trattati, questioni quodlibetali, pareri giuridici e legislazioni, mentre da un lato razionalizza il nuovo ordine sociopolitico affermando la produttività economica e morale delle gerarchie che lo compongono, d'altronde contribuisce a formarlo verbalizzando e teorizzando molti suoi aspetti impliciti. Le disegualianze economiche e politiche che caratterizzano questa nuova realtà, a cominciare da quelle riguardanti i gradi della cittadinanza e le differenze salariali, diventano così parte di una visione del mondo coerente ed egemonica.

The so-called 'medieval economic revolution' (twelfth-fourteenth centuries) also saw the emergence and spread of theological, economic and political languages that analysed, interpreted and judged the social and market situation. This discursive system was based on treatises, quodlibetal questions, legal opinions, and legislation. From one side, this system rationalizes the new socio-political order by stating the economic and moral productivity of its hierarchies. On the other, it contributes to the construction of this new order by verbalizing and theorizing many of its implicit features. Therefore, the economic and political inequalities characterizing this new reality, starting with the different degrees of the citizenship or the wage differentials, become part of a coherent and hegemonic world view.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Europa occidentale, rigattieri, disegualianze economiche, disegualianze politiche.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Western Europe, second-hand dealers, economic inequality, political inequality.

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1. Crescita economica e disuguaglianze: dettaglianti e rigattieri

Il rapporto fra crescita economica due/trecentesca in Italia e disuguaglianze socioeconomiche può essere messo a fuoco con un discreto margine di precisione facendo riferimento al ruolo economico e sociale, complesso e contraddittorio, dei protagonisti del commercio di seconda mano fra Due e Trecento: i 'rigattieri' (*regratarii*, *regratiers*, *regratours*, *ligrittieri*, *baldrigari*).¹ Già una ricerca sulle origini di questa terminologia professionale ne indica l'ambiguità etica ed economica. Il moderno 'rigattiere' come il medievale *regratarius* o *regratier* hanno all'origine un verbo, *recaptare*, significante nello stesso momento il 'catturare', il 'prendere con forza', da cui discenderanno poi nell'italiano moderno anche l'indicazione dell'atto di 'raccattare', 'ricattare' e 'ricettare'.²

Che la condizione e la specializzazione professionale del 'rigattiere' fosse caratterizzata da una certa contraddizione fra il ruolo economico pubblicamente e legittimamente svolto da questi professionisti dell'usato e la loro reputazione socioprofessionale, e che questa contraddizione fosse pienamente percepita da coloro che facevano parte di questo gruppo professionale, appare chiarissimo già a una lettura degli Statuti dell'Arte dei Rigattieri fiorentini.³

Le rubriche 89 e 93 degli Statuti dei Rigattieri fiorentini⁴ – un testo sedimentatosi fra 1296 e 1340 – esprimono in effetti con chiarezza la volontà dei dirigenti dell'Arte di non essere considerati e dunque giudicati simili, analoghi o vicini ai prestatori a interesse su pegno. Più specificamente l'uso dei membri dell'Arte di frequentare i banchi dei prestatori per vedere, valutare ed eventualmente acquistare oggetti impegnati, specialmente tessuti, per poi rivenderli nelle proprie botteghe, viene proibito. Così come, a maggior ragione, viene proibita l'abitudine di gestire all'interno della medesima bottega la rivendita dell'usato e il prestito a interesse. Il testo stabilisce esplicitamente che queste consuetudini, evidentemente diffuse, devono cessare per evitare le continue accuse di complicità con i prestatori o l'identificazione dei rigattieri come usurai o ricettatori, assuefatti ad accettare e a smerciare oggetti rubati, o di origine dubbia, in seguito impegnati. Del resto, le indagini condotte sui

¹ Du Cange *et al.*, *Glossarium Mediae*, s.v. "regratarii". Per i *ligrittieri* senesi e le loro complicate attività ed ascese sociali cfr. Giacchetto, *Siena città manifatturiera*. Cfr. *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, s.v. "baldrigaro" e Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. 1 (VIII, 13): i *baldrigari*, cioè sono mercatanti di ritaglio di panni fiorentini, calzauioli, e pannilini, e rigattieri.

² Varvaro, "Per la storia di 'regata', 'ricattare', 'rigattiere';" Pfister, *Lessico etimologico italiano*, 248. Cfr. anche Ménage, *Le origini della lingua italiana*, 399.

³ Di fondamentale importanza: Meneghin, *The Social Fabric*; Meneghin, "Circular economy," 253-76; García Marsilla, "Introducción," 3-20; García Marsilla, "Ropas de ocasión," 311-50; García Marsilla, "Avec les vêtements," 123-43. Cfr. anche Cherubini, "Un rigattiere fiorentino," 761-69; Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*; Kelsey Staples, "Con-artists or entrepreneurs?," 228-54.

⁴ *Statuti dell'Arte dei Rigattieri*, 244 (Statuti del 1340, c. 89r: *De non eundo vel mictendo ad feneratoros*); 246 (Statuti del 1340, c. 93r: *De non fenerando et exercendo simul et semel artem in eade apotheca*).

beni commerciati dai rigattieri ne rivelano, al di là della polemica, la molteplice e non sempre chiara provenienza (banchi di pegno, ospedali, case private, aste giudiziarie ecc.). Analogamente il criterio di valutazione di questi beni non poteva che essere estremamente variabile, poiché condizionato tanto dal ruolo e dal valore sociale molto disuguali dei soggetti che li vendevano ai rigattieri – enti sacri, esecutori testamentari, usurai, privati –, quanto dallo specifico intervento dei rigattieri stessi nella fissazione del prezzo al momento della vendita dei beni giunto nelle loro mani per vie diverse. L'inquietudine espressa dagli Statuti dei rigattieri fiorentini non è casuale.

È di fatto abbastanza semplice rilevare nel sistema documentario prodotto dalle città italiane, francesi e inglesi o spagnole fra XIII e XIV secolo i segnali di una svalutazione della professione del cosiddetto rigattiere, talvolta identificato con significativo scivolamento lessicale per mezzo del termine 'barattiere', e la denuncia di quella che gli statuti stessi chiamano la *malitia quorundam hominum dicte artis*. Le legislazioni cittadine, i regolamenti dei mercati ma anche la novellistica due-trecentesca manifestano infatti con evidenza l'allarme dei gruppi al potere ossia delle nascenti o formate oligarchie locali di fronte all'affermarsi di una professionalità in via di codificazione, il cui più profondo significato economico risiedeva nella capacità di mettere sul mercato e dunque di valutare in termini di prezzo oggetti la cui origine e il cui valore erano per definizione incerti. Questo allarme, questa inquietudine, d'altra parte, potevano ben sconfinare nel comico e nel grottesco, come rivela la novellistica italiana trecentesca. Il disagio sociale e politico di fronte ai mestieri che mettevano sul mercato merci non prodotte direttamente poteva infatti anche essere esorcizzato, come avviene in Sacchetti,⁵ rimandando il mestiere del *regratarius*, del *regrator*, l'antico *scrutarius*, ma anche quello del *kapelos* o *institor*, il dettagliante (anch'esso non a caso indicato fra XIII e XV secolo per mezzo del lemma *regratarius* o *regratier*), disprezzati da un'intera tradizione greco-romana, come ha compiutamente mostrato Andrea Giardina,⁶ all'indubbia e chiara inferiorità sociale del *baratarius*, il barattiere:⁷ un

⁵ Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, novella CXVII ("Messer Dolcibene, essendo nella città di Padova, e non volendo il Signore che si partisse, con una nuova e sottile astuzia al suo dispetto si parte").

⁶ Giardina, "Le merci, il tempo, il silenzio," 287: "le condanne delle piccole attività commerciali attraversano ininterrotte quasi tutta l'antichità greca e romana".

⁷ Du Cange et al., *Glossarium Mediae*, s.v. "*baratum*," "*barata*," "*barateria*," "*baraterii*," "*barator*." Cfr. Mazzamuto, "Barattiere": "il termine barattiere sembra avere un non incerto etimo medio-latino: *super baractem* (*codex Sulmonensis* del sec. XII) e *barataria* (a Bologna nel 1262), ma si diffonde e si definisce morfologicamente e semanticamente in area romanza: *barata* e *baratar* in provenzale, *barate* e *barater* in francese, *barattu* in siciliano, *baratto* e *barattiere* in toscano. Una sua prima accezione è per così dire plebea e mercantile. In tal senso, negli *Statuta Cadubrii* si parla di 'vox generica, qua apud Italos praecipue vilissimi quique homines... significantur' (Du Cange) e quindi 'qui ex sordido lucro vitam agunt' (Du Cange, 567). Più precisamente nei secoli XIII e XIV erano chiamati barattieri i 'calones', i 'ganeone', coloro che esercitavano la professione di facchino e addirittura di boia, chi teneva un banco di gioco, chi viveva, come ribaldo, alla giornata, rapinando ed esercitando mestieri vili e turpi, anche al seguito degli eserciti (Bongi): 'Intelligentur baracterii seu ribaldi illi qui tribus vicibus, vel ab

termine, questo, che, in modo significativamente ambiguo, indicava sia il trafficante disonesto, chi imbrogliava gli sprovveduti al mercato, sia il giocatore d'azzardo, sia, infine e per analogia, chi si faceva corrompere⁸ (ed è questo l'uso che ne fa Dante).⁹

L'inferiorità del *regratarius*, del *regratier*, del *regater*, del *regatòn*, cioè di chi rivendeva al dettaglio beni economici usati oppure nuovi ma non prodotti da chi li vendeva, poteva così essere decifrata nell'ambito di una sintassi socioeconomica della disuguaglianza che chi aveva voce autorevole descriveva ormai più che come un risultato dell'ordine naturale, come l'effetto di un disordine e di un disinserimento sociale di origine specificamente economica.¹⁰ Si trattava in questo caso di una disuguaglianza, di una minorità dipendente da un vizio di forma ritenuto inerente alla professione del rivenditore o del rigattiere.

2. Mestieri leciti e mestieri illeciti fra legislazione e pratica

Mentre dunque un'intera e lunga tradizione romana e poi cristiana aveva decretato che la *tenuis mercatura* ossia la rivendita al dettaglio e più in generale il commercio di breve respiro era inevitabilmente fondato sull'inganno poiché mirava a un guadagno da realizzarsi istantaneamente, sul momento,¹¹ al contrario di quanto avveniva nella *magna mercatura* il commercio di lunga distanza e il circuito produttivo che esso implicava fondati su larghi intervalli temporali, l'inserimento due ma soprattutto trecentesco di rivenditori e rigattieri o esperti dell'usato nel catalogo dei mestieri codificati come leciti seppure sospetti, ne spostava il significato sociale e produttivo dall'ambito dell'illegalità presumibile a quello di una minorità legale.

In altre parole, nella fase che è stata definita di crescita europea o quanto meno mediterranea della vita economica e del volume ossia della velocità degli scambi, nella fase due-trecentesca della cosiddetta rivoluzione economica e indipendentemente dal suo andamento critico, e cioè dal susseguirsi di cre-

inde, super tavolerium in terrula se spoliaverunt' (*Statuta Cadubrii*). Baratteria era dunque 'fraus, dolus qui fit in contractibus vel venditionibus' e voleva indicare genericamente anche contesa, contrasto, baruffa".

⁸ Pucci, "Le Proprietà di Mercato Vecchio," vv. 40-5 (in Sapegno, *Poeti minori del Trecento*, 403-10), illustra con chiarezza l'ambiguità professionale del 'barattiere' e la sua prossimità a quella del 'rigattiere' e del venditore al dettaglio (il *regratier* francese) nel sistema testuale trecentesco: "E sempre quivi ha gran baratteria: / contentanvisi molto e barattieri, / perché v'è pien di lor mercatantia, / cioè di prestatori e rigattieri, / tavole di contanti e dadaiuoli, / e d'ogni cosa ch'a lor fa mestieri". E più oltre, con riferimento ai venditori al dettaglio che tengono bottega al mercato ("i buon briganti, / che quivi son", vv. 166-7), "non barattieri paion, ma signori" (v. 191).

⁹ Cfr. Olschki, "Dante, i barattieri e i diavoli," 61-81; Crimi, "Baruffe fra demòni," pp. 9-60.

¹⁰ Cfr. le prospettive raccolte in Lenoble, Todeschini, *Cittadinanza e disuguaglianze economiche*; cfr. anche Todeschini, *Come Giuda*.

¹¹ Giardina, "Il tramonto dei valori ciceroniani," 141-63; Giardina, "Le merci, il tempo, il silenzio." Cfr. Todeschini, "Wealth, value of work," 55-68.

scite e stagnazioni,¹² si assiste allo sviluppo di un mercato dell'usato e di logiche della rivendita equivalenti al codificarsi istituzionale e dunque al solidificarsi anche corporativo (e tuttavia conflittuale) di forme dello scambio che, come quelle di cui erano protagonisti i rigattieri, i rivenditori al dettaglio, certi artigiani, i sarti in particolare,¹³ e i commercianti in beni, per lo più tessuti, rinnovati o trasformati e dunque considerati come non più nuovi, sembravano relativizzare il primato civico ed economico dei protagonisti delle arti maggiori, a cominciare dai mercanti-imprenditori impegnati nelle Arti mercantili e laniere, o quanto meno attentare concretamente al loro superiore diritto di determinare il gioco degli scambi e di orientare la dialettica dei prezzi e del valore delle cose.¹⁴ In questa prospettiva l'accorpamento statutario, dilagante nel Trecento, fra arti del nuovo e dell'usato, drappieri e *strazzaroli*, linaioli e rigattieri, sarti e mercanti di panni, per esempio, a Bologna come a Firenze, a Venezia come a Vicenza,¹⁵ così come le cautele che caratterizzano questi accorpamenti normativi, ci informano allo stesso tempo sia dell'ormai avvenuta codificazione civica e professionale di mestieri un tempo considerati marginali e spregevoli o comunque tipici di fasce sociali ben lontane dal centro dell'ordine sociale, sia della complessità di questa annessione e del fatto che essa avveniva a patto che venisse ribadita la disuguaglianza ossia la distanza gerarchica che separava e doveva separare le professionalità della rivendita al minuto da quelle della fabbricazione e della vendita a largo raggio. La cittadinanza minore e degradata del *kapelos* o dello *scrutarius* o dell'*institor* secondo il modello della *civitas* ben ordinata, una rimozione che aveva caratterizzato in epoca romana la loro marginalità e anzi la loro minorità giuridica tanto professionale quanto economica (l'*institor* era per definizione un *filius familias* o uno schiavo, entrambi delegati a commerciare al minuto dal *pater familias* o dal padrone),¹⁶ si trasformava così in una codificazione della disuguaglianza dei rigattieri e dei dettaglianti, dei *regratarii*, una disuguaglianza economicamente funzionale al modello della *civitas* messo in pratica dall'*ars mercatoria* e razionalizzato dagli Scolastici che scrivevano di economia, eppure di per se stessa decisamente inquietante. Non è un caso che, ancora negli Statuti fiorentini dei rigattieri siano molte le norme di autodisciplina che mettono in guardia dalla adulterazione per mezzo di tinture, rimodernamenti o altro, le merci usate messe in vendita.¹⁷ In una satira inglese della fine del XIII secolo, i sarti sono descritti analogamente come trafficanti dell'usato che abilmente rivendono per nuovi abiti vecchi trasformandone l'aspetto. Il testo impiega

¹² Cortonesi, Palermo, *La prima espansione economica*; Palermo, *Storia del commercio*; *La crescita economica dell'Occidente*.

¹³ Cfr. Tosi Brandi, "Il sarto tra Medioevo;" Boldrini, "Prime note," 1-46.

¹⁴ Bibliografia imponente, cfr. almeno Tognetti, "Gli affari di messer Palla Strozzi."

¹⁵ Tosi Brandi, "Il sarto tra Medioevo;" Boldrini, "Prime note;" Pucci Donati, Rinaldi, "Il commercio al dettaglio," 241-57; Pinelli, "Commercianti tuttofare," 260-76; *Statuti dell'Arte dei Rigattieri*.

¹⁶ Cfr. Miceli, "Institor e procurator," 57-176.

¹⁷ *Statuti dell'Arte dei Rigattieri*; Meneghin, *The Social Fabric*; Meneghin, "Circular economy."

immagini medico-religiose, per esempio quella della circoncisione, per parlare della trasformazione di una veste foderata di pelliccia in due diversi capi di abbigliamento, rivenduti poi come nuovi, metaforizzando questa operazione come analoga a un mutamento di identità culturale o religiosa.¹⁸ La tesi di dottorato di Elisa Tosi Brandi (2012)¹⁹ e i suoi lavori successivi propongono molti materiali assai interessanti per quanto riguarda l'ambiguo rapporto che nelle città italiane fra Due e Trecento connetteva i sarti agli *strazzaroli*, determinando tutta una serie di problemi riguardo al valore delle merci manipolate, modificate e commerciate da coloro che praticavano questi mestieri.

Il caso dei rigattieri e dei dettaglianti esemplifica in modo esemplare la convergenza di teorie e pratiche ossia l'intreccio strettissimo fra realtà discorsive, atteggiamenti istituzionali e comportamenti sociali, per quanto aveva a che fare con la definizione e la codificazione fra Due e Trecento delle gerarchie socioeconomiche nelle città europee, e in primo luogo centro-settentrionali italiane. Con una certa chiarezza, infatti, è a partire dalla fine del XII secolo che, fra Italia e Francia, il diverso significato economico, la disuguale utilità delle logiche professionali cominciano ad essere messi in luce da testi di ambito penitenziale, etico-civico e teologico-morale nella prospettiva di una nuova perimetrazione della *civitas* come corpo sociale ed istituzionale. Si potrebbe dire che nell'ambito di un'espansione e di una crescita economica ormai vistosa seppure fortemente sfumata dal punto di vista geografico affiorano discorsi finalizzati a legalizzare e cioè a razionalizzare un sistema di mercati e cioè di città sempre più limpidamente fondato su dialettiche asimmetriche, sulla diversa potenza economica e sul diverso significato civico dei contraenti e su una inizialmente implicita ma poi sempre più esplicita catalogazione degli ambiti professionali ossia dei commercianti attivi sui mercati che ne giustificasse in termini civici ed etici, in termini in definitiva di 'gradi di cittadinanza',²⁰ il diverso peso specifico sulla scena economica e politica ossia la specifica collocazione politico-economica nell'ambito dei mercati in quanto sistemi gerarchici.²¹

Se si considera la sequenza testuale riguardante il significato civico e dunque politico delle competenze professionali che da Pietro Cantore a Parigi verso il 1190 arriva a Tommaso d'Aquino intorno al 1270, si può osservare un andamento delle argomentazioni coerente con quanto stava avvenendo sui

¹⁸ *Song upon the Tailors*, in Wright, *The Political Songs*, 51-6: 55: *Pannus primum circumcisis, / Viduatus et divisus / A sua pellicula, / Jam expertus Judaismum, / Emundatur per baptismum / A quacumque macula. / Circumcisis mundatusque, / Est adeptus utriusque / Legis testimonium; / Quem baptismus emundavit, / Cum secunda secundavit / Pelle matrimonium*. Tradotto dall'editore come segue: *The cloth having been first circumcised, then widowed and separated from its skin, now having experienced Judaism, is cleansed by baptism, from every stain (i.e. it is dyed). Being circumcised and cleaned, and having obtained the testimony of both laws, he whom baptism has cleansed, contracts a new marriage with a second skin.*

¹⁹ Tosi Brandi, "Il sarto tra Medioevo."

²⁰ Piccinni, "Differenze socio-economiche." Cfr. Bellavitis, "«Per cittadini metterete...»,» 359-83.

²¹ Cfr. le osservazioni di Stabel, "From the market to the shop," 79-108.

mercati e anzi una tendenza precisa a trasformare le abitudini economiche e le disparità che qualificavano chi ne era protagonista in dinamiche normative politicamente significative. Si potrà riconoscere un culmine di questa sistematizzazione e della sua capacità di determinare le pratiche nei discorsi che, ai primi del Trecento, a Oxford, uno dei maggiori rappresentanti della Scolastica francescana, Giovanni Duns Scoto, farà a proposito della distanza che intercorreva e doveva intercorrere fra *mercatores* e *regratarii*, fra imprenditori o commercianti di alto livello e rivenditori al dettaglio o rigattieri. Nel testo del Cantore²² una minuziosa analisi dell'utilità sociale ed etica degli *artifices* rivela con chiarezza l'attualità, nella Parigi dell'ultimo XII secolo, dell'argomentazione ciceroniana che distingueva duramente la *tenuis mercatura*, la rivendita al dettaglio o il piccolo artigianato finalizzato alla vendita, dalla *magna mercatura*. Non per caso il primo editore del testo, il monaco belga Georges Galopin, nel Seicento, richiamerà esplicitamente il passaggio del *De officiis* ciceroniano che condannava come altamente sospetto il commercio al minuto.²³ In effetti, stabilito come di consueto il primato etico e produttivo dell'agricoltura, Pietro Cantore procede empiricamente distinguendo fra attività artigianali utili alla *ecclesia* ossia alla società civile identificata come società cristiana e attività artigianali superflue o pericolose. Benché (com'è ovvio trattandosi di un testo confessionale) il criterio di distinzione sia in apparenza esplicitamente e prevalentemente morale volto a negare l'utilità civica ed economica degli oggetti di lusso e di vanità (secondo un paradigma poi riaffiorante nelle legislazioni suntuarie)²⁴ appare chiaro a una lettura attenta che l'obiettivo profondo del testo è di separare l'*utilitas* della produzione e trasformazione di beni operata da *agricultores* e *mercatores* dalla rivendita così come dalla produzione artigianale minuta delle cosiddette *superfluitates*. Diverso è quindi il significato economico ed etico attribuito ai viticoltori (*vinitores*) e a chi lavora nell'industria tessile (*textores*, *tinctores*) o edilizia (*carpentarii*) oppure dell'abbigliamento (*pellipari sutores*, *tannarii*) da quello di chi lavora in botteghe che producono o rivendono abiti o ornamenti. Sebbene ancora non chiaramente cominci da affiorare la distanza fra chi fa parte di una catena produttiva di cui si presume la funzionalità al *bonum commune* dell'*ecclesia* e chi, nella sua bottega, produce o rivende ad una clientela della cui *fidelitas* si può dubitare oggetti nuovi o vecchi non valutabili in termini di mercato ma il cui valore dipende esclusivamente da un apprezzamento soggettivo. Comincia qui una polemica nei confronti di produttori e rivenditori

²² Petrus Cantor, *Verbum abbreviatum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004). Per l'analisi di questo testo cfr. Todeschini, "Wealth, value of work."

²³ Questa edizione con le annotazioni del benedettino Georges Galopin è quella riportata dal Migne nel volume 205 della serie *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: J.-P. Migne ed., 1855). Il riferimento al *de officiis* e alla differenza fra *tenuis* e *magna mercatura* (*mercatura si tenuis est sordida putanda est*) è anche leggibile nell'edizione del *Verbum abbreviatum* curata dallo stesso Galopin (Montibus: ex typographia F. Waudraei, 1639) alla pagina 524.

²⁴ Muzzarelli, Campanini, *Disciplinare il lusso*. Cfr. *Una nuova cultura del consumo?*; Todeschini, "Biens de seconde main."

al minuto di oggetti di lusso e soprattutto di vesti e ornamenti femminili, destinata a durare a lungo fino ad essere sintetizzata nel primo Quattrocento da Bernardino da Siena che in questo tipo di vendita, come più in generale nella presenza sui mercati dei venditori al dettaglio, i *regratiers*,²⁵ vedrà allo stesso tempo una forma condannabile tanto di vanità e lussuria quanto di tesaurizzazione improduttiva.²⁶ Se si rifletta al fatto che, appunto fra XII e XIII secolo, e primariamente tra Inghilterra e Francia, è rilevabile, come si è accennato, il diffondersi della critica sociale in forma di satira di mestieri che come quello del sarto (nel già ricordato *Song upon taylor*, della seconda metà del Duecento, durante il regno di Enrico III) erano considerati all'origine della rivendita di beni economici usati trasformati e proposti come nuovi, e dunque di una riprovazione di quella che era considerata l'infamia professionale di chi smerciava come nuovo l'usato, si può arrivare alla conclusione che è in questo periodo di sviluppo economico commerciale e manifatturiero che la rivendita al minuto di oggetti di cui l'artigiano o il bottegaio non sono produttori comincia a essere considerata pericolosa per il mercato e per l'*ecclesia* che lo contiene, in una prospettiva che è nello stesso tempo economica e disciplinare.

3. *L'incerta cittadinanza dei rigattieri e il prezzo delle cose*

Intorno al 1270, del resto, l'aristotelismo economico rivisitato e aggiornato da Tommaso d'Aquino²⁷ in pagine che saranno poi riprese per secoli, stabiliva l'incompleta o discutibile cittadinanza degli *artifices* – una categoria lavorativa assai vasta comprendente nell'insieme tutti coloro che svolgevano attività intese come servizi utili alla *civitas* –, e di conseguenza la marginalità civica di quanti, poiché in qualche modo paragonabili a *servi*, svolgevano attività economiche che, dalla produzione allo smercio al minuto di beni di consumo non potevano rientrare nella categoria degli *agricolae* o dei *mercatores*.²⁸ Nello studio di questo come di altri casi testuali, si è sbrigativamente liquidata questa marginalizzazione di attività economiche ovviamente diffusissime, in termini di ritardo moralistico della teoria rispetto a pratiche economiche in trasformazione nell'ambito di una crescita e di una accelerazione dei mercati. Sembra invece più verosimile e coerente con lo stato delle fonti leggere questa presa di posizione reinserendola nel panorama di discussioni e legislazioni che, insieme con gli statuti cittadini e con quelli delle arti, davano voce, fra Due e Trecento, a un conflitto tanto economico quanto politico riguardante gli

²⁵ Bernardino da Siena, *Quadragesimale de Evangelio Aeterno*, 150 (sermo XXXIII, II.6), che riprende su questo punto il testo della *Lectura oxoniensis* di Giovanni Duns Scoto, di cui si dirà fra poco.

²⁶ Bernardino da Siena, *Quadragesimale de Christiana Religione*, 73 sgg. (sermo XLVI, "De peccatis vanitatum"). Per cui cfr. Todeschini, *Ricchezza francescana*.

²⁷ Cfr. Todeschini, "Ecclesia' e mercati," 585-622.

²⁸ Tommaso d'Aquino, *Sententia Libri Politicorum*, voll. I-III; Januard, "Risks on Trade." Cfr. Todeschini, "Wealth, value of work."

equilibri di potere nei mercati e la prerogativa o il superiore diritto di stabilire valori e prezzi da parte di quelle che sempre più apparivano come le oligarchie professionali e governative codificate dalle cosiddette Arti maggiori, dai grandi mercanti-imprenditori ai cambiatori-banchieri. La celebrazione della differenza ossia della disuguaglianza che doveva regnare fra *mercatores* ossia imprenditori commercianti e *regratarii*, così come la troviamo nelle legislazioni locali europee, negli statuti delle arti e nelle dissertazioni dei *magistri* della Scolastica parigina e oxoniense, può valere da esempio emblematico di questo conflitto che, in definitiva, riguardava la logica di definizione dei prezzi dei beni di consumo e il rapporto che doveva intercorrere, ufficialmente e formalmente, fra il valore d'uso e il valore di scambio delle materie prime e dei prodotti finiti.

Un culmine della rappresentazione dei *regratarii* in termini conflittuali si rintraccia, non a caso, nelle lezioni di Oxford di uno dei maggiori rappresentanti della Scolastica francescana, Giovanni Duns Scoto, intorno al 1300. L'opposizione fra l'utilità pubblica dei *mercatores* e il danno prodotto sui mercati dalla presenza di quelli che Scoto chiama, seguendo l'uso delle legislazioni francesi e inglesi duecentesche, *regratiers* è netta.²⁹ I *mercatores* intesi come produttori e importatori/esportatori di merci e materie prime sono da equipararsi a dei funzionari pubblici e, in caso di loro assenza, dovrebbero essere assunti dai sovrani per migliorare l'efficienza dei mercati,³⁰ mentre al contrario i *regratiers* in quanto mediatori, dettaglianti e rivenditori, intesi dunque come soggetti economici che modificano arbitrariamente il corso dei prezzi, dovrebbero essere espulsi ed eliminati dai regni e dalle *respublicae*. Il testo di Scoto, facilmente re-inseribile nel sistema discorsivo francescano riguardante gli equilibri di mercato e la definizione dei rapporti fra valore e prezzo (un'elaborazione circolante, quando Scoto scrive da ormai circa cinquant'anni),³¹ al fine di essere compreso a fondo come fonte storica dev'essere messo a confronto con le serie legislative che durante il regno di Enrico III di Inghilterra e quello di Filippo III di Francia avevano normato il mestiere del rivenditore, del *regratier*, soprattutto di beni di consumo quotidiani, di

²⁹ Giovanni Duns Scoto, *Lectura oxoniensis* (ordinatio XV, 2), in Wolter, *John Duns Scotus*, 58-9: *Ex istis duabus condicionibus requisitis in negotiativa iusta patet quomodo aliqui sunt vituperabiliter negotiatores, ut scilicet illi qui nec transferunt nec conservant nec eorum industria melioratur res venalis, nec certificatur aliquis alius simplex de valore rei emendae, sed modo emit, ut statim sine omnibus istis condicionibus requisitis vendat, iste esset exterminandus a republica, vel exulandus: et vocatur ille in gallico regratier, quia prohibet immediatam commutationem volentium emere vel commutare oeconomice, et per consequens facit quidlibet venale vel usuale carius ementi, quam deberet esse, et vilius vendenti, et sic damnificant utramque partem.*

³⁰ Giovanni Duns Scoto, *Lectura oxoniensis* (ordinatio XV, 2), in Wolter, *John Duns Scotus*, 58-9: *si esset bonus legislator in patria indigente, deberet locare pro pretio magno huiusmodi mercatores qui res necessarias deferrent, et qui eas allatas servarent; et non tantum eis et familiae sustentationem necessariam invenire, sed etiam industriam et periculum et peritiam allocare.*

³¹ Todeschini, *Ricchezza francescana*.

alimentari soprattutto. Occorre ricordare che anche nel caso di questi regni la formazione di corporazioni o gilde dei rivenditori di beni al dettaglio o usati è fenomeno, come in Italia, prevalentemente trecentesco, o al più degli ultimi anni del Duecento.

Se dunque si esamina questa produzione legislativa, mettendola a confronto con le disposizioni statutarie italiane del secondo Duecento e del Trecento, si noterà un'analoga attenzione dei legislatori a delimitare lo spazio sia fisico che commerciale dei *regratiers*, intesi come dettaglianti ma anche come rigattieri.³² Il problema di fondo che emerge da questa normativa, ma anche dalle lezioni oxoniensi di Scoto (un testo, si potrebbe osservare, di impatto fortemente normativo anch'esso, visto il significato politico che i *magistri* assumevano nei contesti nazionali o locali) è palesemente di limitare il diritto dei rivenditori (*regratiers*, *regratours*, *regrateresses*) sia di acquistare merci e materie prime in concorrenza con i *mercatores* sia, e forse soprattutto, di definire i prezzi dei beni che rivendevano al dettaglio prima che questi fossero stati contrattati tra i produttori o i *mercatores* e quelli che il testo degli statuti delle gilde mercantili di Southampton, Andover o Winchester chiamano *probi homines de villa et de patria* oppure *proddeshommes de la vile et autres frauns hommes del pais*.³³ La precisazione è importante non solo perché insiste sulla secondarietà del diritto di fare un prezzo da parte dei *regratiers*, ma anche perché sottolinea la natura dubbia della cittadinanza del rivenditore. Non per nulla il *regratier* e il *forestaller* (l'accaparratore o speculatore, cioè chi manipola i prezzi) sono dichiarati come figure analoghe in questa stessa serie normativa.³⁴ Nel testo dei regolamenti parigini dei mestieri (*Registre e Ordonnances*), databile anch'esso all'ultimo secolo XIII, ritroviamo una medesima cautela a proposito dei rivenditori al dettaglio del nuovo e dell'usato (i *frepiers*).³⁵ Dato che in questo caso ci si trova davanti a una legislazione il cui scopo è principalmente di stabilire i doveri fiscali di chi svolge un mestiere nei confronti del sovrano, l'accento batte prima di tutto sul dovere dei *regratiers* ossia dei dettaglianti di comprare il diritto di svolgere questo mestiere dal re. Stabilito questo però, è evidente la precisione del testo nel fissare i criteri di acquisto e di immissione sul mercato di merci (alimentari soprattutto) da parte dei dettaglianti. In particolare, come negli statuti delle gilde mercantili inglesi, il problema centrale è la determinazione dei prezzi da parte

³² Si veda la normativa raccolta in Gross, *The Gild Merchant*.

³³ Gross, 228 (Southampton, anno 1327, no. 70): *Nul regratur de chiueres, des aeneus, des oiseaus, des ozues, des chapons et de gelines. Nul regratour de chyueriz, de Aigneus, de Oiseaus, de Owes, de Chapons, de Gelines, de Pucinis ou dautre manere de vitaille, de fformage fres, Bure, Oefs, ne achate tile manere de vitaille a reuendre auant houre de prime soneie, ne auant que les proddeshommes de la vile et autres frauns hommes del pais eient achate lour manger. E nul regratur ne voytz hors de la vile contre vitaille venaunt en la vile por celi vitaille achater; et qy le fait et de ceo seit ataint perde quanque il auera achate.*

³⁴ Gross, 268: *fforestallers, Regrators and Ingrossers*.

³⁵ *Réglemens sur les arts*, 194 sgg. (*Ordonnances sur le commerce et les métiers, rendues par les Prévôts de Paris depuis 1270 jusqu'à l'an 1300*). Cfr. Bourlet, "Le Livre des métiers," 19-47.

dei *regratiers*. Si proibisce dunque loro di acquistare merci o derrate prima che esse siano giunte al mercato generale di Parigi, così da evitare una manipolazione dei prezzi da parte dei rivenditori (presunti accaparratori anche in questo caso, quindi) e, come recita il testo, l'esclusione dei compratori più poveri dal mercato. Nel caso dei *frepriers*, i *regratiers* che rivendono l'usato, il mestiere è perimetrato da divieti di acquisto di beni usati (tessuti soprattutto) di cui si possa sospettare l'origine dolosa o peggio (panni insanguinati), che siano stati ritinti o trasformati (*refoulés*) o adulterati così da modificarne artificiosamente il valore³⁶ (come si è detto, questo tema è ricorrente anche negli statuti italiani dei rigattieri, ed è l'argomento principale della satira inglese sui *taylors*) ma più in generale regolamentato da precisazioni minuziose il cui obiettivo è di limitare l'intervento sui prezzi di determinate merci (abiti e tessuti soprattutto) scambiate sul mercato cittadino.

Il ruolo degli *stimatori* nel mercato fiorentino dell'usato, un ruolo affidato a rigattieri a Firenze dopo il 1460, così come è stato messo in evidenza da Alessia Meneghin,³⁷ può essere interpretato anche come l'istituzionalizzazione di una salvaguardia contro il temuto intervento di rigattieri e dettaglianti di incerta reputazione sull'equilibrio dei prezzi. Anche la fluidità professionale di dettaglianti e rigattieri, sottolineata di recente dai lavori di Paola Pinelli, Alessia Meneghin, Federica Boldrini, Kate Kelsey Staples e Juan García Marsilla,³⁸ una fluidità che consentiva a sarti, cuoiai, ciabattini e ad altri artigiani di partecipare al commercio dell'usato così come del nuovo, e insomma di essere per dirlo con Paola Pinelli dei "commercianti tuttofare",³⁹ incideva notevolmente sulla loro riconoscibilità civica e sulle cautele legislative che li riguardavano. La definizione dei prezzi di beni di consumo nuovi, usati, modificati, autoprodotti, acquistati all'esterno della città e rivenduti all'interno, da parte delle stesse persone o dagli stessi gruppi professionali non poteva che inquietare i poteri che rivendicavano un controllo dei mercati, e comunque metteva in moto dialettiche del valore/prezzo complesse e sfuggenti.

Le molte vite delle cose di cui hanno scritto Appadurai e García Marsilla,⁴⁰ una molteplicità che appariva nel momento in cui esse si trasformavano in beni di consumo, era sempre più condizionata e determinata dalla fine del Duecento (e in aree europee diverse ma tutte a forte sviluppo manifatturiero e commerciale) dalla manipolazione di professionisti dei mercati che, diversamente dalle figure dei *mercatores* di alto profilo, dei mercanti-banchieri all'origine di quelle che Hunt ha chiamato *super-companies*,⁴¹ facevano parte di gruppi sociali nuovi e discutibili, provenivano spesso da ambienti liminari

³⁶ *Règlement sur les arts*, 198 sgg. Cfr. Castres, "Les pratiques de récupération," 115-40.

³⁷ Meneghin, "Circular Economy."

³⁸ Pinelli, "Commercianti tuttofare;" Meneghin, "Circular Economy;" Boldrini, "Prime note;" Kelsey Staples, "Con-artists or entrepreneurs?;" García Marsilla, "Introducción;" García Marsilla, "Ropas de ocasión;" García Marsilla, "Avec les vêtements."

³⁹ Pinelli, "Commercianti tuttofare."

⁴⁰ Appadurai, *The social life of things*; García Marsilla, "Introducción."

⁴¹ Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies*.

e dovevano costruirsi un credito e alleanze sociali a partire dalla loro versatilità economica e specificamente commerciale. Una versatilità che aveva il proprio punto di forza ma anche di debolezza nella loro capacità di contrattare il valore di beni economici molto diversi e la cui utilità, il cui valore d'uso, poteva spesso essere considerato come il risultato di un inganno o di una dissimulazione.

La codificazione da parte dei dottori della Scolastica e dei giuristi di un sistema di disuguaglianze economiche e sociali che nell'*usurarius* ossia nel commerciante di denaro monetato individuava il momento più basso di un sistema economico sempre più organizzato in termini di speculazione sul valore astratto e probabile o potenziale dei beni commerciati di cui era protagonista un'élite di mercanti-banchieri, ha nelle discussioni e nelle legislazioni riguardanti rigattieri e dettaglianti fra Due e Quattrocento un suo momento cruciale: la posta in gioco è la definizione del prezzo delle cose presenti sui mercati e il rapporto che questa definizione dei prezzi ha con coloro che comprano e vendono o manipolano le merci poi messe in vendita. Politica economica, disciplina dei mercati e criteri di definizione del 'bene comune' si intrecciano strettamente nell'ambito di questa codificazione normativa e dottrinale ricadendo sulla pratica economica e sulle consuetudini delle piazze di mercato.

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**Contro li malvagi uomini e' quai erano ricchi
e [...] volevano afamare la città. I comportamenti
iniqui e asociali dei magnati nello specchio
del lessico politico e della reputazione pubblica
(fine Duecento-prime decadi del Trecento)**

di Roberta Mucciarelli

Come si conciliava nelle città comunali italiane la presenza di robusti nuclei di ricchezza con il governo di una *res publica* popolare che si voleva fondata sulla pace sociale? Quali furono gli effetti della normativa antimagnatizia ai fini del disciplinamento di famiglie avvezze ad accaparrarsi anche con metodi violenti le risorse a disposizione e ad esercitare poteri economici e politici mirando esclusivamente al proprio tornaconto? E come si rivelava questa dialettica nel lessico politico dei contemporanei e nella reputazione pubblica dei magnati? Il contributo riprende questi quesiti sulla scorta di una risalente riflessione storiografica e di alcuni casi di studio che affondano nella cornice cronologica individuata (ultimi decenni del XIII secolo – primi decenni del XIV secolo).

How could the presence of robust nuclei of wealth be reconciled in Italian city-communes with the government of a popular *res publica* which was intended to be based on social peace? What were the effects of the anti-magnates law for the purposes of disciplining families accustomed to grabbing available resources, even with violent methods, and exercising economic and political powers aiming exclusively at their own gain? And how was this dialectic revealed in the political lexicon of contemporaries and in the public reputation of the magnates? The contribution intends to answer these questions on the basis of a historical historiographical reflection and of some case studies that are rooted in the identified chronological framework (last decades of the thirteenth century – first decade of the fourteenth century).

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Italia comunale, magnati, legislazione, fama.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Italian communes, magnates, legislation, fame.

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1. *Popolo e magnati: lessici di un conflitto*

La ricchezza non aiuta pensieri elevati e comportamenti virtuosi: *l'uomo richo quando bene siede, male pensa; e sempre s'ingegna di trovare qualche chosa che vengha a danno de' povari e utilità a sé proprio [...]* E questo si mostra in molte parti de la scrittura, chome el richo senpre à voluto soverchiare el povaro.¹ La considerazione dell'anonimo cronista in margine ai provvedimenti a favore dello Studio cittadino decisi dalla signoria di popolo nel corso del 1321, quando Siena profitò della fuga di molti studenti da Bologna, costituisce un suggestivo punto di partenza per provare a esplorare la piega di una storia che appare al nostro testimone di lunghissima durata, quasi una costante naturale nello svolgimento delle vicende umane. Era dunque per invertire il corso di questa storia millenaria di sopraffazioni e abusi commessi dai più forti in ricchezza contro i poveri che i saggi reggitori della repubblica avevano deciso di potenziare la missione pedagogica e didattica dello *Studium*: si potevano arginare le cattive passioni dei ricchi attraverso uno sforzo educativo che consentisse loro di sottrarsi alla pessima influenza di superbia e invidia; grazie agli insegnamenti dei venerabili dottori e all'impegno dei singoli i *tanti mali* che affliggevano la società sarebbero cessati e tutti, con *perfetto cuore*, avrebbero atteso *al bene dell'anima, ai comandamenti di Dio e al bene della repubrica*.²

La tessitura narrativa del nostro cronista, aderendo e quindi facendo valere il punto di vista dell'élite dirigente dell'amministrazione comunale, ben esemplifica l'intento disciplinare, l'educazione ai buoni comportamenti e alle virtù (*i costumi boni e divoti e santi* nel nostro testo), la dimensione 'salvifica' in cui il Popolo inquadrava le imprese e le azioni politiche più significative e ideologicamente connotate. A partire dal celeberrimo prologo allo statuto dei Cambiatori del 1245, redatto da Rolandino Passeggeri – laddove l'ideologo di fronte ad una società che vedeva sommersa in un abisso di iniquità, affidava le ultime speranze di riscatto al comportamento esemplare e alle virtù professionali e personali dei *campsores*³ – il Popolo si propone insomma come strumento di una 'paligenesi sociale' avocando a sé l'alta funzione di instaurare per l'eternità un nuovo regime fondato sulla pace e la realizzazione del bene comune.⁴

Il sessantennio che corre dagli anni Settanta del Duecento fino al terzo decennio del nuovo secolo vede come noto quasi ovunque, anche se a livelli diversi di intensità, l'elaborazione e la messa in atto di provvedimenti diretti alla realizzazione di un sistema di potere regolato e costruito come "organiz-

¹ *Cronaca*, 120-1.

² *Cronaca*, 120-1.

³ Giansante, *Retorica e politica*, 43-5; su Rolandino si vedano ora anche le osservazioni di Antonelli, "Indagini sul liber expensarum," LVII.

⁴ Efficace sintesi in Vallerani, "Gli assetti istituzionali," 53-5; l'espressione citata è a 54. Sulla nozione densa e cangiante di 'bene comune' si veda almeno Mineo, *Popolo e bene comune*.

zazione di interessi collettivi”, come una *respublica* meglio ordinata.⁵ Un progetto ambizioso che pretendeva – in negativo – il rigetto di tutto un viluppo di pratiche e comportamenti che distinguevano i gruppi delle aristocrazie di tradizione militare e che affondavano le loro radici in una consuetudine di comando, “coercizione e dominio”,⁶ in un *habitus*, in un modo di concepire la lotta politica e l'esistenza sociale del tutto incompatibili con il progetto di affermazione di “nuovi valori della convivenza civile”.⁷ A partire in verità già dagli anni Cinquanta, ma con maggior compiutezza e gravità dagli anni Settanta del Duecento, i comuni di segno popolare avevano avviato la promulgazione di norme antimagnatizie, lungi dall'avere ovunque la stessa forza inibitoria e discriminante.⁸ In ogni caso non si trattava di annichilire un segmento sociale: le competenze belliche e nei maneggi diplomatici, l'esperienza nella gestione del potere e dei suoi compromessi, la ricchezza dei grandi costituivano un patrimonio a cui anche i regimi popolari più accesi avevano necessità di attingere.⁹ A una genuina indignazione per le prepotenze e le prevaricazioni commesse (*rumores* e disordini provocati dai magnati erano stati peraltro il detonatore della normativa antimagnatizia pubblicata in molti grandi comuni di popolo),¹⁰ si univa la volontà di “recuperare i grandi”,¹¹ negoziare il loro apporto, farli convergere su obiettivi di ordinata convivenza, indurli insomma a *vivere secondo ragione, secondo la forma della giustizia e del buon vivere* come recita il lessico di quegli anni.¹² Idee, valori, slogan, che costruivano il profilo di un'etica, assumendo ben presto “un significato politico qualificante”,¹³ autolegittimante, identitario: in una dilatazione dell'importanza di questi concetti (allacciati ai mondi della morale e della religione e filtrati nel patrimonio ideale del Popolo per rivoli diversi) che andava oltre i loro naturali confini tecnici.¹⁴

Il discorso pubblico, i grandi manifesti popolari di cui Sergio Raveggi offrì molti anni fa una insuperata disamina, esibiscono ampie tessere dell'antinomia che caratterizza magnati e popolani.¹⁵ Il tema è stato molto percorso e non occorre dilungarsi. La lisca narrativa individua nella grandezza/grandigia, nella inestinguibile e pervicace violenza, nella superbia, nella *potentia* –

⁵ Nell'ampia bibliografia alcuni riferimenti indispensabili: Artifoni, “I governi di popolo,” 2; Tabacco, *Egemonie sociali*, in particolare 330-40; Milani, *I comuni italiani*; Poloni, *Potere al popolo*. Si vedano anche gli atti del convegno: *Magnati e popolani nell'Italia comunale*.

⁶ Così Tabacco *Egemonie sociali*, 286-7.

⁷ Così ad esempio Diacciati, *Popolani e magnati*.

⁸ Fasoli, “Ricerche sulla legislazione.” Il caso toscano discusso da Raveggi, “La lotta politica.”

⁹ Tabacco, *Egemonie sociali*, 286-7. Raveggi, “Appunti sulle forme di propaganda,” in particolare 481.

¹⁰ Diacciati, *Popolani e magnati*, 359-66; Giorgi, “Il conflitto magnati/popolani.”

¹¹ Diacciati, *Popolani e magnati*.

¹² *Cronaca*, 101 e 344. Ampia panoramica sulle motivazioni ideali esplicitate nella legislazione in Raveggi, “Appunti sulle forme di propaganda.”

¹³ Raveggi, 476.

¹⁴ Sull'insegnamento e l'influenza esercitata da Brunetto Latini si veda Artifoni, “Retorica e organizzazione,” in particolare 163-4; Maire Vigueur, “Progetti di trasformazione,” 281-315.

¹⁵ Raveggi, “Appunti sulle forme di propaganda.”

che il cronista Agnolo di Tura definì come *un potere d'omini e di richeze*¹⁶ – la cifra dei grandi. I grandi erano l'incarnazione della prepotenza, del disprezzo della legge e del vivere civile.

Il processo di categorizzazione sociale dei due gruppi richiese che si amplificassero le differenze e la distanza fra i due soggetti, producendo differenziazioni sul piano valutativo e comportamentale. I popolari che “vivevano secondo le leggi” – mentre i grandi le volevano comandare (scriverà Machiavelli guardando con occhio retrospettivo agli anni del conflitto)¹⁷ – si rappresentarono come *debiles et pauperes* rispetto ai *potentes*, e vollero riconoscersi nell'agnello in spregio del lupo, per addurre la celebre metafora.¹⁸

2. Modelli, status, identità

Il primo problema dei nuovi dirigenti fu, come ovvio, identificare chi fossero i destinatari dei provvedimenti, quelli che si chiamarono *magnates* o *potentes* o *nobiles* o *milites* ma anche *casati*, *maiores*, *hospitia*, *magne parentele*, *de patrimonio*: un insieme eterogeneo di lignaggi di diversa antichità e diversa fisionomia la cui assimilazione – che compresse le differenze tra gli uni e gli altri – si era realizzata in gran parte delle realtà cittadine tra la fine del XII secolo e le prime decadi del XIII.¹⁹ I criteri discretivi adottati furono sostanzialmente due: la pubblica fama e l'appartenenza alla *militia*, corridoio di nobilitazione.²⁰ Numerosi comuni risolsero il problema pratico della loro individuazione *ex officio*, stilando liste di nomi. Sui 63 comuni presi in esame da Gina Fasoli nel 1939 procedettero in tal senso Siena, Firenze, Bologna, Padova, Treviso, Brescia, Modena, Faenza, Lucca, Volterra, Montecchio, Città di Castello, Gubbio, Todì, Orvieto, Viterbo a cui devono aggiungersi Perugia (che prima della redazione del *Libro rosso* del 1333 aveva prodotto almeno due liste, una prima del 1260 e l'altra del 1276), Prato, Pistoia, Arezzo e Roma.²¹

Non occorre insistere in questa sede sul sistema delle liste, punto di snodo della rivoluzione istituzionale e documentaria del comune popolare.²² Limitia-

¹⁶ Salinbeni e Talomei due casate grandissime in Siena, in questo tempo erano nimici, in modo che tutta la città stava in tremore e i Signori di Siena non li potea afrenare per la loro gran potentia imperoché in Toscana non eran simili casate di potere d'omini e di richeze: Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, *Cronaca*, 438.

¹⁷ Citato in Diacciati, Zorzi, “La legislazione,” XV.

¹⁸ Ricciardelli, “Lupi e agnelli,” soprattutto 273-7; Giansante, “I lupi e gli agnelli.”

¹⁹ Cammarosano, “Il ricambio e l'evoluzione.”

²⁰ Sul ruolo del cavalierato: Milani, “Da milites a magnati,” per Siena, Giorgi, «Quando honore.»

²¹ Fasoli, “Ricerche sulla legislazione,” 274-309; Klapisch-Zuber, *Ritorno alla politica*, in particolare 17-24 e Appendice tabella 1; Mucciarelli, *Magnati e popolani*, 120-34. Per Firenze si veda anche: Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*. Su Bologna: Fasoli, “La legislazione;” Milani, “Da milites a magnati;” Blanshei, *Politica e giustizia*, 195-6. Per Roma: Carocci, “Una nobiltà bipartita,” 71-122: 89. Utile sintesi in Castelnuovo, “L'identità politica.” Sull'evoluzione e il significato delle liste nobiliari per un periodo posteriore: Del Tredici, “My desire.”

²² Segnalato da Maire Vigueur, “Révolution documentaire” e poi illuminato soprattutto dagli studi di Milani, “Il governo delle liste,” 149-229; Milani, *L'esclusione dal comune*; e Vallerani,

moci a dire che: 1) al netto delle diversità formali e di consistenza che li connotano, gli elenchi condividono il carattere aperto e strumentale della loro redazione: i cataloghi di nomi erano infatti suscettibili di aggiustamenti (aggiunte e depennamenti) a seconda del momento politico e a dimostrazione che il criterio della pericolosità sociale dipendeva dal giudizio dei nuovi dirigenti comunali che avevano a disposizione un'efficace arma per indirizzare i comportamenti dei grandi, premiando quelli conciliativi e punendo quelli ostili e intransigenti. Negli anni a cavallo fra Due e Trecento, l'attribuzione della categoria di magnate poteva essere utilizzata come provvedimento punitivo anche per i popolani.²³ 2) Dall'iscrizione delle famiglie di magnati in libri o elenchi scaturì la formazione di un nuovo soggetto collettivo dotato di un preciso status, una condizione giuridica (nonostante le eccezioni) implicante pene ed obblighi che gli iscritti trasmettevano, da quel momento, a tutti i discendenti. 3) Le liste erano gestite e controllate dal potere politico: solo l'intervento diretto delle autorità di governo – che quello status avevano creato – poteva modificare quella meccanica a seconda del momento politico e della opportunità. A Firenze Giovanni Villani commentava il rimaneggiamento dell'elenco dei magnati tenuti a sodare nel 1295 col dire che *molti casati che non erano tiranni e di non grande podere* ne erano stati cancellati. Nel 1325, quando furono ammessi al Popolo dieci lignaggi il cronista li definì *minimi e impotenti* adombrando un nesso tra forza economica e status. Ma il criterio economico non bastava: il giudizio dei dirigenti faceva leva sul calcolo della pericolosità sociale: la *tirannide* e la *malitia*, nel lessico villaniano.²⁴ Parimenti, le analisi condotte su Bologna confermano che “erano le alleanze e le affinità politiche e non le differenze nell'estrazione socio-economica”, nei gradi di ricchezza, a determinare i cambi di status per tutto il periodo che va da fine Duecento ai primi decenni del XIV secolo.²⁵

Diciamo che nel momento in cui furono istituiti (e di volta in volta nei momenti in cui furono aggiornati) questi cataloghi, costruiti secondo criteri politici e funzionali ad un sistema politico congegnato sull'esclusione,²⁶ servirono utilmente a individuare – ‘utilmente’ soprattutto nelle città più dinamiche, laddove la galleria dei gruppi eminenti era meno stabile, meno cristallizzata agli occhi della pubblica opinione e più aperta ad accogliere i protagonisti nuovi dei processi di mobilità ascendente di primo Duecento – con ‘certezza’ e senza dubbio chi si voleva colpire, ovvero l'area del dissenso o del sospetto. Con certezza: perché occorreva evitare che *potenti e casastici* eludessero le norme presentandosi come popolari (così a Lucca nel 1308), che popolari indegni di essere ammessi nel Popolo godessero dei privilegi connessi al loro

“La cittadinanza pragmatica,” Vallerani, “Il valore dei cives,” Vallerani, “Logica della documentazione.”

²³ Blanshei, *Politica e giustizia*, 164.

²⁴ Villani, *Nuova cronica*, 29-30, 360-3, 454; sul rimaneggiamento delle liste: Klapisch, *Ritorno alla politica*, 25. Sull'ombra della tirannide nelle mature repubbliche, si veda Zorzi, “Langoscia.”

²⁵ Blanshei, *Politica e giustizia*, 167

²⁶ Milani, “Il governo delle liste,” Milani, *I comuni*, 128-9; Mineo, “Preminenza e distinzione.”

status, o che popolari dallo stile di ‘vita onorevole’ potessero essere confusi con i magnati (e allora a Modena nel 1306 si redassero due libri: prima quello dei Nobili e poi quello in cui fu scritto *tutto il popolo*).²⁷

L'adozione da parte dei popolari di pratiche sociali e di modelli di comportamento elaborati dalle nobiltà cittadine per legittimare la propria preminenza poteva avere delle conseguenze?

A Firenze, prima che il Popolo egemonizzasse il comune, alcune famiglie originariamente di ‘basso stato’, come Bardi o Cerchi, furono integrate nelle liste degli anni Novanta perché – come ha ricostruito Poloni – tra il 1267 e il 1280 avevano consapevolmente adottato lo stile di vita dei nobili e acquisito la dignità cavalleresca per accreditarsi politicamente in seno al gruppo di potere. Si trattò, evidentemente, di una scelta perdente e dunque, scrive la studiosa, dagli anni Ottanta a Firenze nessun popolare puntò più su quell’obiettivo e su quel canale di successo.²⁸

Quaranta anni dopo, nel corso degli anni Venti del Trecento, lo statuto del Capitano del popolo stigmatizzava la tensione imitativa che sembra serpeggiare tra le fila degli *artifices* fiorentini: le pazze spese in cui incorrevano *ad similitudinem magnatum* non si addicevano affatto al popolo, il quale invece doveva vivere *ad rationem*, ovvero con sobrietà e misura, virtù a fondamento di prosperità e buono stato.²⁹ Questo sconfinamento era destinato – almeno nel caso addotto – a risolversi politicamente nel disciplinamento suntuario ma non c’è dubbio che simili slittamenti provocavano una incoerenza, una dissonanza fra identità politico-giuridica e identità sociale percepita. Non abbiamo attestazioni di contenziosi sul punto e neppure elementi per valutare eventualmente quale sarebbe stato il comportamento delle corti di giustizia fiorentine, ma è assai plausibile che il richiamo alla ‘ragione’ del preoccupato legislatore fosse un tentativo di intervenire sull’immagine pubblica del Popolo, in un momento già di profonde trasformazioni interne, auto-rappresentandolo come forza ‘eticamente’ egemone; uno sforzo, insomma, di indirizzare il processo dinamico e sempre *in fieri* di costruzione della propria identità politica in termini non dissimili da quanto stava avvenendo ad altre latitudini: la critica ad uno stile di vita dispendioso, proprio dell’aristocrazia magnatizia, si sintonizzava in qualche modo con ciò che avveniva nelle corti europee dove, come hanno convincentemente indagato Evangelisti e Todeschini, i più insigni esponenti del potere sovrano proprio a partire dal tardo Duecento avevano cominciato ad introiettare una grammatica comportamentale costruita “con il vocabolario della povertà” per il tramite di attivi esponenti francescani.³⁰

²⁷ Mucciarelli, *Magnati e popolani*, 121; Fasoli, “Ricerche,” 285.

²⁸ Poloni, “Fisionomia sociale,” soprattutto 810-1.

²⁹ *Quia plerumque fiorentini cives et artifices non ad rationem sed ad similitudinem magnatum vivere volunt et sic dispendia expensarum incurrunt: Statuto del Capitano del popolo*, 205 (V, 12).

³⁰ Todeschini, “Povertà, mancanza” (da cui è tratta la citazione); Evangelisti, “Mercato e moneta.”

A Bologna sappiamo che i giusdicenti si trovarono a trattare numerose cause aventi per oggetto lo status personale e la sua notorietà; dunque, lo stile di vita e la reputazione pubblica di un individuo fissata dal vicinato e validata in sede giudiziale da precisi requisiti tecnici poteva avere un peso nei contenziosi.³¹ In obbedienza al principio vigente nelle società tradizionali di conformità tra aspetto esteriore e status, c'erano agli occhi dei contemporanei stili di vita o sistemi di segni distintivi e caratteristici dei magnati e dei popolani. La situazione però si complicava quando di fronte al giudice la vita di un magnate non appariva diversa da quella di un popolano grasso: l'uno e l'altro potevano condurre una *vita honorabilis*, anche un popolano indossava pellicce e cavalcava per la città su selle dorate e poteva mantenersi un cavallo *ad modum militum*: nella Bologna di fine Duecento, da almeno tre generazioni, i testimoni di processi trattati alla curia del Capitano del Popolo – analizzati da Sarah Blanshei – dichiaravano che gli appartenenti alle corporazioni del cambio e della mercanzia avevano adottato i segni e i simboli della cavalleria. Che, l'abbiamo detto, era il più appariscente tra i simboli di prestigio sociale e di nobilitazione. Ma i testimoni dichiaravano anche che questi popolani, mentre vivevano la loro onorevole vita, nondimeno erano di popolo e come tali da tutti erano considerati: l'*habitus* di un popolano si basava a Bologna sullo svolgimento dell'attività politica, sulle opinioni espresse pubblicamente e recepite come *verba popullaria*, sul tipo di mestiere praticato, sulla qualità delle frequentazioni.³²

Per i magnati le cose si ponevano diversamente: l'iscrizione nelle liste costituì l'elemento probatorio principale dell'identità magnatizia. Il che non impedì che fossero celebrati numerosi processi per risolvere dispute sul tema: processi nei quali la 'fama' era quesito diffusissimo: cosa significava lo stile di vita cavalleresco o come si squadernassero pubblicamente la ricchezza o la violenza; ma a quel punto il principio ereditario, il legame di sangue era diventato un elemento decisivo per la definizione giuridica dello status magnatizio, riferita che fosse all'addobbbamento cavalleresco di un antenato o alla sua registrazione in lista.³³

La storiografia degli ultimi decenni ha molto valorizzato i tratti di originalità dell'esperienza di popolo, la diversità di cultura politica, di sistemi di valore, di modelli di vita sociale che i popolari esprimevano rispetto alla tradizione. Di una distanza 'antropologica' ha parlato Maire Vigueur.³⁴ Pur da posizioni opposte invece sia Gaetano Salvemini sia Nicola Ottokar credevano

³¹ Sulla definizione della fama e il suo ruolo giudiziario e politico esiste una densa bibliografia: si veda il recente Thééry-Astruc, «Fama»: Public Opinion,» e dello stesso autore «Fama: l'opinion publique,» oltre a Migliorino, *Fama e infamia*; Klapisch-Zuber, «Honneur de noble;» Valerani, «La fama nel processo;» Mucciarelli, «Bisogna essere molto prudenti;» Guastella, *Word of Mouth*.

³² Blanshei, *Politica e giustizia*, 229, per le citazioni nel testo.

³³ Blanshei, 196-264.

³⁴ Maire Vigueur, «Il comune popolare.»

fermamente nel primato dell'economia per la formazione e la configurazione delle classi sociali.³⁵

Quando all'aprirsi degli anni Quaranta del Trecento alcuni magnati senesi – qualificatisi *minores* – indirizzarono la loro richiesta di protezione al gruppo dirigente, puntavano il dito sulla sperequazione interna al gruppo dei casati, una sperequazione obliterata per il fatto che tutti erano *indistincte* scripti in *libro magnatum*; quel che è interessante è che per far valere il loro stato di minorità rispetto ai *maiores* dalle cui vessazioni volevano essere tutelati al pari dei *populares*, utilizzarono retoricamente ciò che sembrava un'ovvietà, o se si preferisce senso comune, *inter magnates et potentes ex una parte et populares ex altera est magna et longa differentia*.³⁶ Una faglia correva lungo la linea della distribuzione della ricchezza fra i due gruppi sociali, asserivano dunque i magnati senesi.

Sulla natura di classe del conflitto che oppose la nobiltà fondiaria e la 'borghesia industriale' il giovane Gaetano Salvemini, affascinato dal Loria, non ebbe dubbi quando diede alle stampe il suo *Magnati e popolani*;³⁷ la presa di distanza "dall'oltranza del determinismo" avverrà solo – come ha chiarito Artifoni – nel 1923-4, poco prima dell'uscita del volume di Ottokar secondo il quale, invece, potremmo dire semplificando al massimo, alla fine del XIII secolo i magnati non erano molto diversi dai grandi popolani: ricchi gli uni e gli altri, la base delle loro fortune andava ricercata un po' nelle rendite fondiarie, un po' nelle imprese commerciali.³⁸

3. *Ricchezze: usi e abusi*

La storiografia cittadina rinvia immagini scomposte ma eloquenti di queste fortune; immagini spesso incistate in un giudizio valutativo che distingue un uso buono e proficuo da uno disonorevole e pernicioso: i fiorentini Cerchi *buoni mercatanti e gran ricchi, vestivano bene, teneano molti famigli e cavalli e aveano bella apparenza*;³⁹ munificenza e ospitalità: il cronista polano Guglielmo Ventura, che scrive ad Asti a fine Duecento, registra con ammirazione lo splendore dei magnati Guttuari ("magnifiche erano le loro mogli, di bisso e porpora i loro abiti, di preziosissime ghirlande di margherite adornate le loro teste; i loro servi indossavano vesti doppie; ogni giorno alla loro tavola si saziavano i forestieri"), ben diversi dai superbi e invidiosi Solari, giudicati colpevoli di alimentare la violenza e la disgregazione della *civitas*.⁴⁰

³⁵ Maire Vigueur, "Il problema storiografico," 8.

³⁶ Archivio di Stato di Siena (ASS), *Consiglio Generale*, 129, c. 58rv, 18 dicembre 1341.

³⁷ Artifoni, *Salvemini e il medioevo*.

³⁸ Ottokar, *Il Comune di Firenze*, in particolare 112, 115-6.

³⁹ Compagni, *Cronica*, 45 (I, 20).

⁴⁰ Guglielmo Ventura, *Memoriale*, col. 762 (XLVIII, mia la traduzione). Per inquadramento del cronista, Garofani, "Un cronista di popolo;" su Asti: Bordone, "Progetti nobiliari."

Laddove si sono tentate stime e valutazioni della ricchezza fiscale dei due gruppi è emersa la superiorità dei magnati sui loro antagonisti. Il celebre paradigma salveminiano esce, almeno in parte confermato dall'analisi di Silvia Diacciati sulla diversa configurazione sociale dei due gruppi.⁴¹ A Perugia tra fine Duecento e primo Trecento i magnati conservano i caratteri di una nobiltà militare a base fondiaria, chiaramente distinta dal popolo delle arti.⁴² Lo spoglio dei dati contenuti nella *libra* di Perugia del 1285 e l'esame della distribuzione della ricchezza nell'ambito delle singole parrocchie urbane, ha posto in evidenza – come ha scritto Alberto Grohmann – sia il maggior peso dei valori immobiliari, rispetto a quelli mobiliari, sia il fatto che le cifre d'estimo più elevate siano relative ad esponenti del ceto magnatizio: dunque, in uno dei momenti di massimo vigore dell'esperienza popolare, sono i magnati a detenere il privilegio in termini patrimoniali.⁴³ A conclusioni non dissimili era arrivato Grundman sulla base dell'analisi campione condotta sulla *libra* di Porta San Pietro del 1320.⁴⁴ A Siena la bella fotografia restituita dalle pionieristiche analisi di Giovanni Cherubini condotte sulla *Tavola delle Possessioni* mostrava la preminenza dei casati per ciò che riguarda la proprietà terriera e immobiliare nelle *libre* sottoposte ad indagine. Quattro consorterie magnatizie (Tolomei, Buonsignori, Gallerani, Salimbeni) possedevano da sole oltre il 20% di tutta la ricchezza privata.⁴⁵ Successive analisi su alcuni lignaggi hanno permesso di correggere al rialzo il valore di alcuni patrimoni magnatizi iscritti nella *Tavola*,⁴⁶ mentre la minuziosa indagine condotta da Andrea Giorgi sulla presenza patrimoniale e castrense dei casati senesi nel territorio – un territorio caratterizzato da una vigorosa espansione neo-signorile ben più di quella verificatasi a Firenze o in altre realtà toscane – ha consentito di apprezzare le dimensioni spettacolari del fenomeno. Gli esponenti dei 53 casati oggetto delle delibere antimagnatizie (circa 2.000 individui) esercitavano

⁴¹ Diacciati, *Popolani e magnati*, 97 e 392-3: “almeno nella prima metà del Duecento una differenza sociale tra quelli che saranno i due futuri gruppi antagonisti pare già essere stata presente così come doveva già allora cominciare a delinearsi una altrettanto diversa mentalità [...]”; “alla fine del Duecento i magnati vale a dire gli eredi dei grandi milites dei primi decenni del secolo si distinguevano per vari aspetti dai popolani: in buona parte avevano rifiutato l'economia mercantile e finanziaria preferendo continuare a fondare il proprio potere economico sulle rendite fondiarie e sui redditi derivanti dal patronato ecclesiastico. Dovevano inoltre trarre profitto dall'esercizio militare”.

⁴² Tabacco, “Dinamiche sociali,” 297.

⁴³ Grohman, *L'imposizione diretta*, 97.

⁴⁴ Grundman, “La posizione economica,” 809: “la nobiltà, benchè numericamente rappresentasse solo una piccola percentuale della popolazione, controllava una percentuale delle ricchezze molto grande senza proporzione con quella dei popolani”.

⁴⁵ Cherubini, “Proprietari, contadini.” Si veda anche il capitolo di Cristoferi in questo volume.

⁴⁶ Basti dire che i magnati Tolomei vantavano, al tempo della *Tavola*, una ricchezza patrimoniale di oltre 360.000 lire contro le 177.000 stimate in precedenza. Mucciarelli, *I Tolomei*, in particolare 307-25; Mucciarelli, *Piccolomini*, 311-59; Carniani, *I Salimbeni*, 131-46; si veda adesso una sintesi in Ginatempo, “Toscana senese,” 481-501 e le schede nello stesso volume su Tolomei (641-9), Salimbeni (651-64) e Piccolomini (665-72). Si veda anche il capitolo di Cristoferi in questo volume.

diritti di varia natura su almeno 2/3 dell'ottantina di castelli in cui ad inizio Trecento gravavano presenze signorili.⁴⁷

Una conclusione provvisoria: sebbene sussistessero forti dislivelli economici all'interno del gruppo dei magnati, dai casi di studio disponibili pare di poter affermare che tra fine Duecento e primi decenni del Trecento questi risultavano nel complesso nettamente distinti dalla gran parte delle famiglie popolari.

Dell'ampio spettro di temi e problemi che trascina con sé lo studio del funzionamento delle istituzioni annonarie che una recente stagione di studi ha contribuito a rivisitare e discutere (rapporto tra carestie e politiche di rifornimento, coinvolgimento di mercanti banchieri impresari, costi e spesa pubblica...),⁴⁸ mi limito ad isolare ed evocare l'interferenza che venne a realizzarsi tra le esigenze e gli obiettivi di governo, un governo asservito idealmente al bene comune, e gli interessi dei grandi proprietari che tracimando invadevano le istituzioni. Se la questione annonaria non fu la radice dello scontro, come pensava Salvemini, rappresentò certamente un campo di tensione.

Affamare la città è un crimine particolarmente odioso: un crimine politico, lesivo degli interessi generali, un crimine che scarica le sue conseguenze sulla popolazione ma soprattutto sulle fasce sociali più vulnerabili ed esposte. Anche per questo, o forse proprio per questo, la carestia andava a porsi come banco di prova dell'efficacia e della legittimità del potere dei governi di popolo:⁴⁹ la *tuitio* verso i *pauperes* – una zona sociale potenzialmente amplissima tanto quanto fluida – definiva in modo forte e privilegiato i contenuti della loro sovranità e anche della loro specifica identità.

A partire dagli anni Ottanta del Duecento la preoccupazione delle autorità cittadine senesi per il regolare approvvigionamento di beni alimentari si riflette in uno sforzo legislativo di cui si conservano importanti evidenze.⁵⁰ La magistratura attiva fino agli anni Ottanta, i *domini mugnariorum*, fu rivista e i *domini* sostituiti dal *iudex Deveti*, le cui funzioni furono minuziosamente definite parallelamente all'imposizione di un *devetum* all'esportazione di frumento e alla costituzione di una dogana per stabilizzare i prezzi. Compe-

⁴⁷ Giorgi, "Il conflitto magnati/popolari," 161.

⁴⁸ La bibliografia è ricca ed articolata; mi limito a rinviare a: Palermo, Fara, Benito, *Políticas contra el hambre*; Bourin, Carocci, Menant, To Figueras, "Les campagnes;" Bourin, Drendel, Menant, *Les disettes*; Grillo, Menant, *La congiuntura*; Benito, *Crisis alimentarias*; Palermo, *Sviluppo economico*; Magni, "Politica degli approvvigionamenti."

⁴⁹ Un cursorio esame del linguaggio dei congiurati ci dice che se ne servirono per indicare il livello di iniquità e avarizia dei governanti che volevano abbattere al grido *viva el populo e muoia chi ci afama*. In quell'anno, in quei giorni, chiosa il cronista, a Siena era grande carestia: dunque gli insorti profitano della congiuntura per accusare il governo, puntando il dito contro l'inazione o peggio le cattive indicibili intenzioni. In ogni caso il governo non aveva difeso la popolazione dagli effetti della carestia e meritava di cadere. Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, *Cronica*, 549 (13 agosto 1346).

⁵⁰ A partire dagli Statuti, conservati in ASS, *Abbondanza*, 1-5; i cinque registri coprono gli anni 1281-1337. Per una prima analisi dei registri statutari si veda: Caltabiano, *La politica*, in particolare 48-53 e appendice documentaria, 155. Ringrazio l'autrice per avermi consentito la consultazione della sua tesi.

tenze e funzionamento dell'*officium*, posto sotto il controllo del capitano del Popolo, vennero via via delineandosi grazie ad un lavoro continuo di affinamento e revisione normativa (confluita negli *Statuti dell'Abbondanza*) almeno parzialmente osservabile grazie ai registri di *ordinamenta*.⁵¹ La riforma dei provvedimenti annonari aveva esplicite motivazioni chiamando in causa oltre l'onore del comune, il sostentamento dei *pauperes*;⁵² quando nel 1309 si decise di riformare lo statuto del Divieto, fatto già *longo tempo passato* e dunque troppe volte *corretto et amendato*, si ribadiva che era stato *composto [...] in favore et aiutorio de le povare persone et accioché abbondança de le co' da vivere inde ne seguitasse*.⁵³ Una norma statutaria obbligava il giudice del Divieto a inizio mandato a convocare i magnati e i nobili della città e del contado, soprattutto *pro illis qui stant et habent castra et terras in testeriis et circa testeria civitatis* perché prestassero idonee garanzie fideiussorie a non agire *contra Devetum*.⁵⁴ Procedura sommaria, periodiche inquisizioni, spie ed accusatori segreti, tortura, erano gli strumenti in mano del giudicante; magnati e nobili non potevano *advocare coram dicto iudice*, i loro familiari e scudieri erano ineleggibili al ruolo di *custodes Deveti*.⁵⁵ Bastino questi accenni per cogliere la coloritura disciplinante e antimagnatizia della riformata normativa annonaria di fine Duecento-inizio Trecento.

Come ha mostrato Stefano Magni studiando i problemi legati all'approvvigionamento cerealicolo a Pisa, Orvieto e Firenze, le politiche del grano vanno pensate come "settore strategico immerso nel conflitto politico e sociale urbano".⁵⁶ A Siena, dopo una preliminare indagine di Morgana Caltabiano che ha delineato gli sviluppi normativi dell'ufficio,⁵⁷ rimane da compiere un'analisi delle componenti sociali coinvolte nella politica annonaria cittadina e precipuamente del ruolo giocato dai magnati. Alcuni dei quali, come risulta da un rapido sondaggio relativo agli anni in cui maturò lo sbarramento antimagnatizio (1274-7) ed entro il 1300, figuravano tra i *domini Canove* e i *domini Deveti*, fecero parte delle balie che normavano la materia, sostennero fattivamente in assemblea l'approvazione dei provvedimenti elaborati con il loro concorso.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Per l'ultimo ventennio del secolo: ASS, *Statuti di Siena*, 4, cc. 59r-60r, 150r-152r, 162r-163r. Per un sintetico profilo di questa tipologia documentaria rinvio a Mucciarelli, "Il consiglio generale."

⁵² Così la norma trapassata nel costituito volgare del 1309-10: *Di fare una Dogana di grano. Et per onore del Comune di Siena et sustentamento de' povari et bisognose persone [...] si faccia la Dogana di grano: Il Costituto del Comune*, t. 1, 385-6 (d. I, r. 551).

⁵³ *Il Costituto del Comune*, t. 2, 556 (d. VI, r. 42: *Di rifare lo statuto del Divieto*).

⁵⁴ ASS, *Abbondanza*, 3, cc. 16v-17r (ante 1300) citato in Giorgi, "Il conflitto magnati/popolani," 201. La norma è edita anche in: Caltabiano, *La politica*, 201.

⁵⁵ ASS, *Abbondanza*, 2: *Quod dictus iudex et camerarius debeant mictere exploratores secretos; Quod iudex faciat secretas inquisitiones* e *Abbondanza*, 3, 5r-v, 11v. Si veda: Caltabiano, *La politica*, 200, 208 e 235.

⁵⁶ Magni, "Politica degli approvvigionamenti."

⁵⁷ Caltabiano, *La politica*.

⁵⁸ ASS, *Biccherna*, 484, c. 2v; 486, c. 2r (elezioni degli ufficiali); *Statuti di Siena*, 4, c. 59r (commissione legislativa eletta nel giugno 1292); *Consiglio generale*, 50, cc. 58r-60r (discussione e

Lo scenario aperto dal passo dell'Anonimo richiamato nel titolo del mio intervento fa riferimento al tentativo collocato negli anni Novanta del Duecento di ingenerare una carestia di grano operato da alcuni ricchi (*che non volevano vendere*) allo scopo di imporre un cambio di regime (*potere ghuidare la città e 'l popolo a uno loro modo*).⁵⁹ Le simpatie del cronista verso l'operato dei Nove sono chiare: in questa e in altre occasioni simili le scelte dell'esecutivo si rivelano provvidenziali e le manovre dei malvagi vengono di volta in volta sventate grazie alla prudenza dell'esecutivo e alla risolutiva collaborazione dei principali casati cittadini.⁶⁰ Casati 'collaborativi' la cui funzione civica viene esaltata dallo storiografo in un passo che può essere letto come un puntello del processo di validazione ideologica della necessaria e possibile cooperazione, in vista del bene comune, che doveva realizzarsi ai massimi livelli sociali: tra dirigenti popolani guelfi e casati disponibili ad abbandonare superbia e avarizia e a 'convertirsi' al ben agire. La memoria cittadina è intrisa di episodi edificanti di questo tipo su cui non posso indulgere.

Nei fatti, il compromesso sociale e politico che inquadra a Siena i rapporti fra popolo e magnati fu faticoso ma proficuo per entrambi i contraenti del patto, almeno durante il nostro sessantennio: l'appoggio politico e la fedeltà dei grandi si collocarono nel processo di costruzione di un sistema di governo teso sul filo di idealità e parole d'ordine schiettamente popolari, che se andava protetto dal rischio di uno strapotere dei grandi non esitava ad utilizzare le risorse pubbliche come moneta di scambio politico-economico, con quegli stessi attori. La penetrazione economica e politica nelle campagne da parte dei magnati – funzionale allo sviluppo giurisdizionale, politico-militare di Siena sul territorio – ebbe però ripercussioni importanti sul processo di impoverimento dei comitatini e delle comunità rurali.⁶¹ Inserendosi nel processo di erosione dei vecchi dominati aristocratici, grazie a mirate politiche matrimoniali, ad una aggressiva politica di acquisti, al dispiegamento di prestiti, all'occupazione dei ruoli tecnici di garanzia (la fideiussione) per i debiti di privati e comunità verso Siena, i magnati senesi – che come scrive Giorgi dovettero esercitare forme di controllo importante sulla produzione di derrate agricole⁶² – assunsero un ruolo protagonista nelle dinamiche di espropriazione, indebitamento, indebolimento dei comitatini e delle collettività rurali.

Il caso del castello marenmano di Torniella indagato da Eloisa Azzaro grazie allo scavo compiuto nell'archivio Bulgarini d'Elci – un caso che va ad integrare e ad aggiornare utilmente il quadro delle nostre conoscenze⁶³ – mostra la bontà di adottare categorie di analisi e strumenti di misurazione

votazione di *ordinamenta deveti*, 31 agosto 1296).

⁵⁹ Cronaca, 78-9; la citazione nel titolo a 78.

⁶⁰ Cronaca, 125.

⁶¹ Su cui si veda adesso Ginatempo, "Processi di impoverimento."

⁶² Giorgi, "Il conflitto magnati/popolani," 173.

⁶³ Azzaro, "Storia di una comunità." Per un utile inquadramento si veda il contributo di Pellegrini, "Siena e Torniella," nello stesso volume.

analitici, saldamente ancorati alla concretezza dei segmenti territoriali, degli sviluppi e delle dinamiche locali, eloquenti anche ai fini del nostro discorso.

Della storia del castello, delle sue risorse (idrauliche e boschive), degli interessi e delle aspirazioni che vi si coagularono e che aprirono la strada a dinamiche di affermazione politica e di capillare e violenta penetrazione patrimoniale dispiegato da un gruppo di uomini d'affari provenienti dal ceto magnatizio senese e includenti alcuni attori locali, basti qui accennare alla narrazione che ne fece la comunità una volta consumato il triste epilogo: una narrazione che contestando le pretese della controparte proponeva la propria versione dei fatti denunciando i mezzi fraudolenti ed aggressivi utilizzati dai magnati per *arrecarsi tutta la terra a le loro mani*, facendosi specchio della coscienza che il comune rurale aveva delle tappe, dei meccanismi (il ruolo della garanzia fideiussoria), degli strumenti (il debito) e degli attori che avevano determinato il suo collasso economico (*povari et mandichi, nudi et scalçi*).⁶⁴ Una caduta nella povertà determinata dal corto circuito che nel periodo considerato veniva a realizzarsi fra ambizioni all'autonomia delle comunità più vivaci, intervento dei capitali magnatizi e /o dei più dotati imprenditori economici, la crescente fiscalità cittadina dentro uno stato territoriale in espansione e in cerca di assestamento. Un campo di forze complesso e dal terreno troppo accidentato perché l'equilibrismo politico del regime potesse trovarvi soluzioni davvero efficaci anche per i *pauperes* comitatini strozzati dai grandi.

⁶⁴ Le citazioni sono tratte da: Azzaro, "Storia di una comunità," 76.

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Abiti e ornamenti come segni di distinzione/ diseguaglianza sociale nella legislazione suntuaria cittadina del Medioevo

di Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani

Il saggio si propone di analizzare la normativa suntuaria frutto dell'attività legislativa delle città dell'Italia centro settentrionale a partire dalla fine del Duecento con un incremento sempre più significativo nei secoli successivi. Si trattò all'inizio di un disciplinamento delle spese per abiti e ornamenti, soprattutto femminili, rivolto agli appartenenti a tutte le classi sociali. Nel tempo i governi cittadini introdussero distinzioni ed eccezioni in relazione al grado sociale ed economico creando una gerarchizzazione funzionale al buon reggimento della città, affidato a giuristi, predicatori e cittadini. Attraverso una disamina storica e normativa, il testo ripercorre l'evoluzione delle regole che, mediante restrizioni su abiti, ornamenti e spese, miravano a controllare le 'apparenze', a differenziare i vari strati sociali creando inevitabili diseguaglianze nei contesti urbani.

The essay aims to analyse the sumptuary legislation which was the result of the legislative activity in the cities of Central-Northern Italy: it began at the end of the thirteenth century with a significant increase in later centuries. Initially, it was a disciplining of expenses mostly related to women's clothing and accessories, aimed to all social classes. Later, the city governments introduced distinctions based on the socio-economic status of the citizens, creating a hierarchy that was functional for an effective municipal administration entrusted to lawyers, preachers and eminent citizens. Through a comprehensive historical and legal review, the text traces the evolution of regulations that, by imposing restrictions on clothing, ornaments, and expenditures, aimed to control 'appearances', to differentiate social strata, creating inevitable inequalities in urban contexts.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Italia centro-settentrionale, città, leggi suntuarie, diseguaglianze sociali.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Central-Northern Italy, cities, sumptuary laws, social inequality.

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1. Legislazione suntuaria: definizioni

Se c'è un terreno, un mondo delle diseguaglianze, questo è per molti versi collegabile alla legislazione suntuaria che, come è noto, prese il nome dalle spese (*sumptus*) relative al lusso particolarmente nelle vesti e negli ornamenti del corpo così come nella quantificazione delle doti e nei conviti. Potremmo allora dare una prima definizione della legislazione suntuaria come la vasta produzione di norme dirette a contenere e contrastare il lusso, inteso come “vistosa esorbitanza rispetto a normali parametri di soddisfazione” o ancora come “sovrabbondanza, eccesso nel modo di vivere”.¹ Ma sappiamo che quella normativa fu molto più complessa e differenziata rispetto a quanto ora detto, tanto che Muzzarelli suggerisce per essa una più articolata definizione quale complesso di “provvedimenti gerarchizzanti ovvero di inclusione/esclusione ma anche di codificazione estetica di appartenenze (sociali, famigliari, religiose etc.) senza necessario riferimento al lusso”.²

Va sottolineato che gli studi e le numerose pubblicazioni di Muzzarelli (cui farò sovente riferimento) costituiscono per l'Italia, e non solo, il frutto maturo di riflessioni e aggiornamenti documentari sul tema del contenimento delle spese in tutte le sue declinazioni, come anche in materia di moda o meglio di moda “quando fa storia”.³ La studiosa ha fornito in anni recenti un esauriente panorama storiografico delle ricerche che sull'argomento suntuario hanno portato a risultati di ottimo livello, e lo ha fatto con l'intento di ricostruire “la storia della storia dell'interesse per le leggi e le relative posizioni, valutazioni, interpretazioni”.⁴ Si tratta di una narrazione che parte da lontano (da Ludovico Antonio Muratori) e che si articola in due fasi (la prima dagli anni Settanta dell'Ottocento agli anni Venti del Novecento, la seconda dagli anni Ottanta del Novecento ad oggi), con una pausa sostanzialmente dal primo dopoguerra fino alle novità tematiche portate dalla rivista *Annales* e dalla relativa scuola storiografica, comunque in continuità rispetto al periodo precedente, ma con un significativo e innovativo collegamento con la storia delle donne e poi ancora della prostituzione e della predicazione.⁵ Alcune studiose sono state, secondo Muzzarelli, particolarmente rilevanti, come Diane Owen Hughes con il suo saggio pionieristico pubblicato nel 1984 in *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne*, che in un'ottica comparativa presentava le leggi suntuarie come strumento di governo, aprendo la strada a un fortunato filone interpretativo. Fece seguito nel 1990 il famoso contributo *Le mode femminili e il loro controllo* collocato all'interno di un testo collettaneo basilare come la

¹ Maruzzella, *La moda tra controllo e mercato*, 57. Ascheri, “Tra storia giuridica e storia ‘costituzionale’”, 201, cita la *quaestio* 169, *Summa, secundae partis* di san Tommaso che parla di “affetto disordinato” nei confronti di oggetti e beni. In generale e per dei primi quadri regionali: Muzzarelli, Campanini, *Disciplinare il lusso*.

² Muzzarelli, “Un secolo (e passa) di studi”, 15.

³ Muzzarelli, “Storia e moda”, 9. Si veda anche: Muzzarelli, *Breve storia della moda*.

⁴ Muzzarelli, “Le leggi suntuarie”, 168.

⁵ Muzzarelli, 181; Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 46-7.

Storia delle donne, coordinata da George Duby e Michelle Perrot con l'intento di presentare "al grande pubblico il bilancio delle ricerche [...] vigorosamente" sviluppatesi in quel ventennio appunto.⁶ E ancora spicca nel panorama storiografico Rosita Levi Pisetzký con i suoi numerosi studi che hanno messo in luce il "significato e il valore sociale della moda e degli oggetti ad essa attinenti", così come Alan Hunt nel 1996 ha scritto di *social recognizability* riguardo alle sontuarie.⁷ Mi piace ricordare che Levi Pisetzký riutilizzò in chiave critica quanto raccolto e pubblicato per Perugia da Ariodante Fabretti nel 1886 (l'unico a valorizzare queste fonti non più solo ai fini di pubblicazioni per nozze),⁸ notando tuttavia che "uno spirito provinciale" e "un buon senso paternalistico" caratterizzavano quella normativa studiata dall'erudito perugino,⁹ riconsiderata nella sua novità nel 2002 da Catherine Kovesi Killerby nel suo *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, un'opera di ricognizione davvero ampia che copre un lungo arco cronologico arrivando al Rinascimento in relazione a una vasta area tematica e a un numero considerevole di città analizzate nella loro produzione normativa.¹⁰

Anche gli storici del diritto hanno contribuito nel tempo a far transitare le sontuarie da uno spazio di semplici curiosità a quello di oggetti di edizioni e riflessioni, a partire da Ludovico Zdekauer – per citare forse il principale studioso mosso dall'intenzione di occuparsi di realtà cittadine all'interno della storia d'Italia –, per arrivare in tempi recenti a Mario Ascheri e al suo convincente enunciato: nel problema del lusso "la storia del diritto ha una posizione centrale, perché la disciplina, il disciplinamento del lusso si effettua naturalmente per il tramite della legislazione, della normazione" che è prerogativa cittadina comunale frutto di autonomia o più tardi di sovranità.¹¹ Sempre Ascheri insiste nei suoi studi sullo stretto legame tra le sontuarie e l'ideologia segnatamente comunale del 'buon governo' ovvero dell'*honor civitatis*, interpretato come 'motore' del disciplinamento sociale complessivo della collettività, per cui qualunque tipo di intervento, specie normativo, delle autorità preposte era da collegare con l'esigenza di salvaguardare proprio l'*honor* sopra ricordato, che era anche *decus civitatis*. Si tratta di concetti non astratti ma ascrivibili al contesto municipale in senso lato perché le città, le *civitates*, in quanto *res publicae* erano obbligate a legiferare su ogni aspetto della vita

⁶ Owen Hughes, "La moda proibita," 82-105; Owen Hughes, *Le mode femminili e il loro controllo*, 166-93. Si veda: Muzzarelli, "Le leggi sontuarie," 181-3 e Taddei, "La législation somptuaire."

⁷ Levi Pisetzký, *Storia del costume in Italia*; Levi Pisetzký, "Moda e costume;" Levi Pisetzký, *Il costume e la moda*. Si veda: Muzzarelli, "Le leggi sontuarie," 182-3 e Nico Ottaviani, "De gli ariede e fregiature," 337.

⁸ Fabretti, "Statuti e ordinamenti sontuari," 137-232. Alcuni di quei documenti furono riproposti da Gallo, *Il valore sociale dell'abbigliamento*, I-XLI: *Appendice*. Si veda: Muzzarelli, "Le leggi sontuarie," 175-6.

⁹ Levi Pisetzký, "Moda e costume," 943. Si veda anche: Nico Ottaviani, "De gli ariede e fregiature," 365.

¹⁰ Muzzarelli, "Le leggi sontuarie," 183; Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*. Si veda anche: Nico Ottaviani, "De gli ariede e fregiature," 337.

¹¹ Ascheri, "Tra storia giuridica e storia 'costituzionale'," 210-1.

sociale, pubblico e privato, e ciò al fine di garantirne il 'buon governo',¹² in relazione alla struttura urbana come alla tenuta dell'ordine e dei comportamenti tramite i tribunali civili e penali, alla distribuzione delle attività artigianali, al mercato, ai rapporti con il contado, al decoro delle abitazioni e strade, alla conservazione delle mura, al livello culturale e dell' 'apparire' o delle 'apparenze' dei cittadini e cittadine.

I due termini ('apparire' e 'apparenze') avevano, come noto, significato opposto rispetto all'uso attuale che li vede antinomici a 'realtà' e 'sostanza', mentre nel passato "l'apparenza faceva tutt'uno con la sostanza", mediata quest'ultima attraverso un linguaggio specifico, quello degli abiti, il cui uso doveva per l'appunto essere regolato dalla legislazione suntuaria perché nessuno si appropriasse dei segni, delle "apparenze", relativi ad una condizione sociale diversa da quella effettiva di appartenenza.¹³

Nel tentativo di contenimento ora detto, per molti versi impegnativo, quella legislazione si sforzò di distinguere, categorizzare, infine includere e/o escludere; insomma, si trattò di uno strumento politico, un mezzo efficace per rafforzare gerarchie, per renderle riconoscibili, per comunicarle attraverso abiti e ornamenti.¹⁴ E quella segnaletica servì anche per ribadire, ove ce ne fosse stato bisogno, la distinzione tra gli abitanti della città e quelli del contado, distinzione ben nota e variamente formalizzata.¹⁵

Per arrivare compiutamente ed efficacemente a una funzione gerarchizzante, la normativa suntuaria ha dovuto percorrere una lunga strada, partendo dalle prime tracce presenti a Genova già alla metà del XII secolo, tracce non strutturate in corpi legislativi omogenei,¹⁶ per aumentare poi in misura significativa da metà Duecento ed esplodere nei secoli successivi. Quanto al dato spaziale, il rimando è al mondo comunale italiano in senso stretto, alle città italiane del centro-nord: è un prodotto cittadino, della città per la città e per i suoi abitanti.

Nonostante la notevole continuità ora detta – dal XII al XVIII secolo – tuttavia la legislazione suntuaria ha faticato a farsi apprezzare nella sua natura giuridica, dal momento che a lungo studiosi anche di fama hanno considerato quelle norme come "mere enunciazioni di principio" non cogliendo "la loro natura effettivamente coercitiva" tale da ricondurle "a pieno titolo nell'ambito del giuridico", come studi recenti hanno dimostrato, in linea con le enunciazioni di Ascheri già ricordate.¹⁷

La legislazione di cui si parla affondava le sue radici in territori prescrittivi di grande vastità, primo tra tutti quello costituito dalle *leges* di età romana

¹² Ascheri, 205; Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 37-8.

¹³ Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, 8-9; Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 38.

¹⁴ Muzzarelli, 36-42; Muzzarelli, "Una società nello specchio," 19; Nico Ottaviani, "La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria," 14-5.

¹⁵ Varanini, "L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia," 133-76; Francesconi, "Scrivere il contado," 499-529.

¹⁶ Ascheri, "Tra storia giuridica e storia 'costituzionale'," 201.

¹⁷ Boldrini, *Per la storia delle leggi*, 3.

repubblicana e poi imperiale; tra queste, la *lex Oppia* del 215 a.C., considerata “l'archetipo normativo” di molte altre, l'unica ad essere stata abrogata, l'unica indirizzata non già al *luxus mensae* quanto piuttosto alle vesti, agli *ornamenta* e ai cocchi (particolarmente delle matrone romane, che premetterò infatti per la sua abolizione); aveva l'intento di proporre, in un periodo di criticità rappresentato dalla seconda guerra punica, un modello di comportamento in assonanza con la frugalità del *mos maiorum* e in controtendenza rispetto alla competizione e al dispendio economico finalizzato all'acquisto di clientele, pericoloso per l'integrità patrimoniale della classe dirigente senatoria romana.¹⁸ Altre leggi furono emanate in età repubblicana (di cui si ricorda l'ultima, di Cesare, nel 46 a.C.) più centrate sul lusso conviviale e sulla sua immoderatezza, influenzata dal crescente filellenismo, senza mai giungere però ad un progetto legislativo sistematico.¹⁹ Leggi superate e quasi accantonate²⁰ da Augusto che, con la *lex Iulia de vestitu et habitu*, ripropose un modello etico e moralizzante affidato alla del tutto nuova “costrizione legislativa” dell'imperatore, sensibile in ogni caso all’“emergere di una soggettività patrimoniale femminile”,²¹ mentre i successori da Tiberio in poi, con l'eccezione di Vespasiano, si allontanarono sempre più da questa impostazione per affermare la ricchezza e lo sperpero dei privati – da consentire, ma sempre in misura inferiore rispetto al sovrano – come elementi portanti per le nuove carriere politiche.²²

Per l'alto Medioevo, dopo l'“eclissi” del diritto romano seguita alla caduta dell'impero d'occidente, si assistette a una riemersione ovvero a un riaffacciarsi delle problematiche suntuarie in connessione con il diritto canonico e con quello civile, ovvero con il *Decretum Gratiani* che, nell'organizzare materiale vario che teneva conto della tradizione normativa e patristica della Chiesa unita a quella giuridica romana, toccò il tema dell'*ornatus* relativamente ai *mores* dei sacerdoti invitati alla *temperantia ciborum et vestium*; conteneva anche riferimenti al mondo laico – si raccomandava la *pudicitia* nei matrimoni – oltre a spunti sparsi contro la *inanis gloria* e a un condiviso e generale auspicio di vivere con temperanza.²³ Ai laici in particolare si rivolgevano soprattutto il *Digestum* e il *Codex* all'interno del *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, più coercitivi rispetto al *Decretum*: il *Digestum* consentiva doni maritali e legati d'oro e d'argento a favore di donne ma imponeva già un'attenzione specifica

¹⁸ Vettori, “Il lusso che non si poteva concedere alle donne,” 52-84.

¹⁹ Bottiglieri, “Le leggi sul lusso.”

²⁰ Tutte, meno la *lex Iulia* promulgata da Cesare nel 46 a.C., che imponeva uno stile di vita frugale in consonanza con la nuova diffusa sensibilità sociale, in aperta controtendenza rispetto alla *Lex Cornelia* emanata nell'81 a.C. dal dittatore Silla. Quest'ultimo, mentre stabilì tetti di spesa per i senatori, ridusse in realtà la severità delle leggi precedenti concedendo a sé stesso ampi margini di esclusione: Zecchini, “Ideologia suntuaria romana.”

²¹ Vettori, “Il lusso che non si poteva concedere alle donne,” 72.

²² Longo, “Leges sumptuariae,” 129-30; Bottiglieri, *La legislazione sul lusso*, 103-8, 139-61; Bottiglieri, “Le leggi sul lusso,” Zecchini, “Ideologia suntuaria romana.”

²³ Dettagliata l'esposizione dei temi in Ascheri, “Tra storia giuridica e storia ‘costituzionale’,” 201-3.

per le vesti che potessero trarre in inganno quanto ad appartenenza sociale. Il *Codex*, infine, con orientamento molto repressivo scandito per categorie (la glossa accursiana *Fibulis* elencava re, militari, sacerdoti, avvocati, rustici) insisteva sulla *temeritas privata*, cioè sulle forme di lusso privato quando esso si presentava, come nella *lex* di Augusto, audace al punto da sfidare la maestà imperiale.²⁴

2. Cronologia suntuaria di età medievale e moderna

Le suntuarie ebbero certamente significato politico, legato al tema della ‘governabilità’,²⁵ ovvero al rafforzamento del potere o dei poteri che si avviavano nel tempo.

Sulla base di questo assunto, possiamo dire che la statuizione suntuaria medievale, e poi moderna, dalle origini fino agli esiti finali, ha attraversato almeno tre fasi.²⁶ In quella iniziale, in coincidenza con governi a forte impatto popolare – come avvenne a Perugia tra Due e Trecento – essa si combinò e si saldò con la normativa antimagnatizia, conoscendo un notevole incremento finalizzato all’intento di produrre effetti contro le ostentazioni di “potenza di vanità” da parte di soggetti ben definiti politicamente e socialmente, ovvero per evitare che “gli antichi signori spiccassero su tutti gli altri per magnificenza”.²⁷ In questa prima fase le norme restrittive erano rivolte a soggetti prevalentemente femminili, con qualche eccezione, ma in ogni caso *cuiuscumque conditionis et gradus* ovvero *de che stato e grado se sia*. Siamo di fronte a un disciplinamento generalizzato *in negativo* (come viene definito da Ascheri),²⁸ che proibisce a tutte le componenti sociali spese, riduttive dei patrimoni e sostanzialmente improduttive, a fronte di più proficui impieghi pubblici, e con esse preclude determinati lussi o meglio smodate ostentazioni del lusso, così nelle vesti come nei conviti o ancora nelle cerimonie familiari.

Ma all’inverso, e senza troppe difficoltà, comincia a prevedersi un “disciplinamento in positivo” – ed è la seconda fase –, cioè la possibilità per soggetti ben definiti, *doctores, iudices e medici, uxores vel sponse militum vel doctorum* di godere di aree di privilegio finalizzate all’esclusione da alcune restrizioni.²⁹ Risulta molto evidente dalle motivazioni che la città presenta gli esclusi come ‘modelli’; Ascheri ha parlato addirittura di un ‘bisogno’ di figure d’eccezione da parte della collettività, che in quelle ‘rarità’ si riconosceva con

²⁴ Ascheri, 203-4. Molto ampio il ventaglio di citazioni dal *Decretum* e dal *Digestum* in Boldrini, *Leggi suntuarie*, sub indice, 379-80.

²⁵ Muzzarelli, “Un secolo (e passa) di studi,” 17.

²⁶ Nico Ottaviani, “Introduzione,” XXX-XXXIV.

²⁷ Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, 13.

²⁸ Ascheri, “Tra storia giuridica e storia ‘costituzionale,’” 207-8.

²⁹ Nico Ottaviani, “Introduzione,” XXIV-XXV per il volume *La legislazione suntuaria. Secoli XIII-XVI*.

orgoglio municipale.³⁰ In questa ottica, la cerimonia più solenne, quella che suggellava l'eccezionalità del personaggio era sicuramente il funerale, l'occasione più visibile del "disciplinamento in positivo":³¹ coloro che avevano dato lustro alla città, potevano e dovevano distinguersi nel momento estremo della morte e delle onoranze che davano luogo a quello che potremmo definire un 'lusso funebre', comunque sempre caratterizzato da un certo contenimento.³²

Nel caso di Perugia (in cui la prima normativa suntuaria data dagli anni Settanta del Duecento),³³ proprio a ridosso della Peste, immediatamente prima e dopo, la città impone norme restrittive che possiamo leggere nello statuto in volgare del 1342 ma anche nelle *Riformanze* e nel *Giudiziario*, il quale nel 1347, nel 1354 e ancora nel 1366 raccoglie una serie di condanne (su cui tornerò più avanti) nei confronti di signori perugini appartenenti al ceto magnatizio, elencate per nome e patronimico, che portavano ornamenti *contra devetum* relativo all'uso di *schagiali* (cinture), corone da testa ornate di perle e oro, fregiature (bordature) di vaio, tuniche o villane cioè vesti *divisate* recanti, in almeno un caso, "certe folie deaurate" a ornare il collo e parte dell'abito.³⁴ Dal 1376 quegli stessi divieti, o alcuni di essi, cominciano a cadere per ben identificate tipologie di soggetti: *in militibus, doctoribus legum, decretalium et medicine et eorum uxoribus et domicellis*, le quali mogli portare *possint quicquid eis placuerit et sub quacumque forma voluerint*, come si ribadisce poco dopo in una *additio* di inizio Quattrocento.³⁵

Il fenomeno, appena affacciato a Perugia in quell'anno, come anche in altre città, si lega al fatto che la legislazione suntuaria cominciò a subire una evoluzione finalizzata a meglio definire alcune aree d'eccezione o di "esenzione dalle limitazioni", motivate esplicitamente da un elemento in più, quello di distinguere a scalare diversi 'gradi' sociali – e siamo alla terza fase – a cui dovevano corrispondere diversi gradi o 'tetti' di 'ornato': *attenta qualitate cuiuscumque ordinis et dignitatis*.³⁶ Le suntuarie diventavano così gradatamente per le città uno "strumento di governo",³⁷ atto ad assecondare le aspettative di una élite, moderando, fissando distinzioni e soprattutto contenendo quelli *che non si contentano vivere secondo il grado loro* i quali, così facendo cioè sovvertendo le regole, potevano provocare instabilità, mentre la dichiarazione di intenti del potere pubblico era quella di assicurare il mantenimento del "pa-

³⁰ Ascheri, "Tra storia giuridica e storia 'costituzionale'," 208. Vedi anche Cavallar, Kirshner, "L'esenzione dei 'doctores'," 201-27.

³¹ Esposito, "La società urbana e la morte," 6-23. Nico Ottaviani, "La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria," 39.

³² Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 199-201.

³³ Monacchia, "Perugia," 1-246.

³⁴ Monacchia, 6-7 e 52-71.

³⁵ Monacchia, 86-90 e 101-2; a questa altezza cronologica si parla per la prima volta della *bullatura* [...] *cum aliquo signo comunis seu officialis*, di cui non è rimasto alcun registro, ovvero *librum* [...] *qui semper stare debeat in cancelleria*: Monacchia, 127 e 131.

³⁶ Nico Ottaviani, "Introduzione," XXXI.

³⁷ Muzzarelli, "Un secolo (e passa) di studi," 14-5.

cifico stato” della città, cioè in ultima analisi della *pax*.³⁸ E se pure è vero che la finalità espressa, ad esempio nei prologhi delle leggi,³⁹ era sempre quella del “buon governo cittadino”, proprio questo veniva utilizzato per coprire il vero intento, quello di mantenere lo *status quo*, evitando ai *parvenus* di apparire sullo stesso piano delle famiglie che costituivano il ceto di governo: si vedrà la rovina di molte famiglie; *perciocché per alcune che ve ne siano, le quali possono fare le spese senza danno et incomodo loro, ve ne sono poi infinite altre, che anco che siano povere, nondimeno per essere di uguale o superiore qualità, si sforzano se non di avvanzarle, almeno di arrivarle, con grave danno e pregiudizio di se stesse*.⁴⁰ E così le distinzioni tra i gradi dell'apparire finirono per introdurre previsti e prevedibili motivi di disegualianza, tra élite e non élite, tra i *gentilhomini* e gli esercitanti *le arti mecaniche*, tra cittadini e *comitatini* i quali ultimi con le loro mogli limitatamente troviamo citati nel dettato della legge, e se ciò avveniva (*li homini dei borghi o li contadini o i comitativi*), era per negare o ridurre al minimo gli elementi dell'“apparire”.⁴¹

La legislazione suntuaria, dunque, strutturò una riconoscibilità che era individuale e collettiva insieme: era identificazione, distinzione e, di conseguenza, esclusione per alcuni soggetti.⁴² Sempre in tema di ‘gradi dell'apparire’, Franco Franceschi ha scritto di “un comune desiderio di ordinare gerarchicamente la società assegnando a ogni sua componente i propri segni distintivi”, desiderio che si accompagnava al radicato timore dei legislatori nei confronti della “forza sovvertitrice del denaro”,⁴³ che poteva permettere ai “gradi inferiori” di ostentare oltre il consentito, soprattutto pensando a quelle *superbe [donne] che non si contentano vivere secondo il grado loro*.⁴⁴ In definitiva, una certa immobilità era garanzia contro gli squilibri ora detti ma anche contro pericoli rappresentati da *inhoneste iuvenum societates*, come nel caso di Perugia divisa nel Trecento da forti e sanguinose contrapposizioni interne tra nobili e ‘popolari’, la qual cosa portò ad una generalizzata proibizione delle vesti o calzature *divisate* ovvero fatte con stoffe diverse e di diversi colori o recanti simboli di appartenenza, con i quali si alludeva a divisioni politiche interne al tessuto cittadino.

³⁸ Nico Ottaviani, “Introduzione,” XXXIV. Nico Ottaviani, “La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria,” 41.

³⁹ Nico Ottaviani, “Introduzione,” XXI-XXII.

⁴⁰ Monacchia, “Perugia,” 209.

⁴¹ Monacchia, 197: *le contadine [...] et altre donne familiarmente habitante il contado et esercitanti l'arte rusticale, non possino portare alcuna sorte di oro vero né finto, eccetto in uno anello solo per il dito, et li sia prohibito ogni sorte de rachame etiam di argento o di seta, perle, et ogni sorte di veste, non solo di oro o di argento ma etiam di drappo di seta, eccetto un paio di maniche [...] et possino portare cuffia, bindelle della testa [...] et uno vezzo che non passi uno scudo e mezzo, e non possino portare coralli alle mani*. Si veda anche: Nico Ottaviani, “Introduzione,” XIII.

⁴² Calvi, “Le leggi suntuarie e la storia sociale,” 213-4.

⁴³ Franceschi, “La normativa suntuaria nella storia economica,” 167; Muzzarelli, “Un secolo (e passa) di studi,” 21-3.

⁴⁴ Biviglia, Romani, Tedeschi, “Foligno,” 479-80.

A Perugia preoccupazioni di questo tipo torneranno in un decreto di Braccio Fortebracci, signore dal 1416 al 1424, decreto emanato nel 1420 per tramite del suo luogotenente, *Bindaccius de Fibindacciis de Ricasulis de Florentia*, avente lo scopo di evitare eccessi che riguardavano proprio le vesti o le calzature divise o con *signa* relativi a qualche *societas* o *secta*, elementi che potevano provocare *scandala*, termine polisemico riferibile alla discordia come anche a *seditiones* e *tumultus*, reati politici a detrimento del vivere civile in generale ma dello stato del signore Braccio in particolare. Dunque, il decreto aveva una natura squisitamente politica, tanto che erano esclusi dalla proibizione i *famuli*, i servitori delle famiglie nobiliari, quelli che avevano sempre portato quelle vesti e scarpe con i colori degli stemmi delle famiglie consentanee a Braccio, e quelli che stavano *ad stipendia domini Brachii*, dunque parte del suo seguito, armati o non armati. Si prevedeva che un terzo della multa andasse al delatore, un terzo all'ufficiale esecutore, un terzo alla camera, cioè alla cassa, del signore.⁴⁵ Dunque, un decreto che imponeva regole e proibizioni, non relative a sfarzi, lussi nelle vesti o altro, quanto piuttosto finalizzate a esclusioni di natura politica a favore del signore, se pure ammantate sotto preoccupazioni di ordine sociale.⁴⁶

In maniera del tutto diversa si porrà, quasi un secolo dopo, a Città di Castello la *magnifica casa de li magnifici Vitelli* per i quali nel 1509 i priori cittadini stabilirono che insieme a *offitiali de corte, doctori et cavalieri spe-rondoro sieno liberi cioè non subietti a le infrascripte leggi*, che di seguito elencavano privilegi in dettagliata progressione, in questo caso in base all'entità della dote, e dunque al valore economico e sociale delle famiglie.⁴⁷

Lo strumento utilizzato dai comuni per disincentivare gli eccessi di spese fu prevalentemente l'imposizione di pene pecuniarie o multe: in pratica chiunque, se cittadino ed abbiente, poteva essere punito con il pagamento di ammende anche consistenti se trovato – o meglio se la moglie o la figlia – erano trovate in possesso di vesti o oggetti 'vietati' o se contravvenivano alle restrizioni imposte in occasione di eventi di visibilità familiare. Dunque, ancora esclusioni per chi non poteva pagare ma probabili vantaggi per i comuni tramite l'incameramento di dettagliatissime multe, che costituirono perciò "uno snodo essenziale: un deterrente, un mezzo per incassare denaro per usi civici, un dispositivo per partecipare alla ripartizione di quanto incassato".⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Monacchia, "Perugia," 119-21; ho trattato questo argomento in un mio contributo, "Il lusso e le sue regole," di prossima pubblicazione negli atti del convegno *Braccio 600. 1424-2024*, svoltosi a Montone, 22-23 giugno 2024.

⁴⁶ Erano esclusi dalle restrizioni i giovinetti minori di dodici anni, i giullari, le meretrici, i forestieri con le mogli e i servitori che potevano vestire *iuxta eorum morem originarie regionis*: Monacchia, "Perugia," 88. Gli abiti da giovani e da vecchi insieme a quelli che attestavano la provenienza da altri paesi costituivano 'sottocategorie' rispetto a quella 'generale' delle vesti: Muzzarelli, "Consumi e livelli di vita," 452. Restrizioni riguardo ai giovani vi erano anche a Firenze: Taddei, "La législation somptuaire."

⁴⁷ Nico Ottaviani, "Città di Castello," 326-8.

⁴⁸ Muzzarelli, "Un secolo (e passa) di studi," 16-7; Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 70.

Quanto al primo aspetto, certamente i comuni avevano puntato in una prima fase, come detto, a una generalizzata morigeratezza dei costumi e dunque delle spese, come dimostra il dettato dello statuto del 1342 che parlava di proibizioni e restrizioni a *skifare le spese inutile [...] per le citadine e contadine peruscine*: il marito doveva pagare, traendola dalla dote, una multa di cinquanta lire per vesti di più colori, di troppa stoffa e di lunghezza non consentita, come anche per doni o altro in occasioni di monacazioni e nozze; in questi ultimi casi la multa prevista era di cento lire, mentre cinquecento ne dovevano pagare gli ufficiali inadempienti che non avessero fatto almeno due *inquisitiones* al mese; in ultimo compare la *scomunicatione* che il vescovo *farà fare per tutte le chiese*.⁴⁹ Sono molto alte in questo testo le pene pecuniarie che vennero ridimensionate nello statuto sempre perugino del 1366, più dettagliato quanto ai ‘casi’ ma al contempo più contenuto circa la quantificazione delle multe che scendono da cinquanta a venticinque lire *de perlis, lapidibus, fregiaturis de auro et argento et schigialibus non portandis* o ancora *de velluto et drappis*.⁵⁰

Paola Monacchia ha messo a confronto per Perugia le norme dello statuto del 1342, reiterate e ampliate in quello sopra citato del 1366, con alcuni significativi frammenti provenienti da un registro di condanne – ne ho accennato nelle pagine precedenti – emanate dall’ufficio del maggior sindaco preposto anche alla ‘moderazione dei costumi’. In quelle carte sono elencati i nomi di signore appartenenti al ceto magnatizio, in quel momento orbato dei suoi componenti maschi colpiti da bando,⁵¹ signore inquisite per un certo ‘ventaglio’ di imputazioni relative a vesti divise, cinture troppo preziose, guarnacche di panno intagliato orlate di vaio, mantelli rifiniti con fregiature di foglie d’oro o di animali, corone d’oro, argento e perle, queste ultime particolarmente vietate quando andavano ad ornare, insieme a fili d’oro e gemme, maniche, spalle e scollature di abiti, queste ultime da ridurre sempre. Le signore in questione furono colpite da procedimento inquisitorio che si concluse con la confessione e il pagamento della multa, da trenta/quaranta/cento soldi fino a sette lire (circa centoquaranta soldi), talvolta ridotta *propter beneficium confessionis*, come risulta dalla relativa *apodissa* compilata dal notaio del massaro ovvero dell’ufficiale preposto alle entrate e uscite del Comune⁵².

⁴⁹ Monacchia, “Perugia,” 49-52.

⁵⁰ Monacchia, 71-85: 77 in cui viene dettagliata anche la composizione del *tagliere* [...] in *nuptiis* con carni varie, cacciagione, *tortelli carniū et turta parmegiana*.

⁵¹ Nico Ottaviani, “De gle ariede e fragiature,” 357-8; Nico Ottaviani, *Storia illustrata di Perugia*, 92-5.

⁵² Monacchia, “Perugia,” 6-9 e 52-71, relativamente ai frammenti del *Giudiziario* degli anni 1347, 1354 e 1364, 49-52 e 71-85, per le norme del 1342 e 1366. Ne ha scritto Muzzarelli con confronti con altre città, *Le regole del lusso*, 58-64. Per gli anni in questione la serie *Massari* dell’Archivio storico comunale di Perugia presso l’Archivio di Stato locale conserva solo per il 1354 il registro no. 80, indicato come *Entrate* ma in realtà relativo a *exitus*, e per il 1356 il registro no. 86, relativo a entrate provenienti però esclusivamente da condanne penali.

In queste condanne la rigidità del testo del 1342 si stempera quanto all'entità delle multe che solo raramente raggiungono le sette lire contro le cinquanta del dettato statutario; inoltre a partire dal 1366 è prevista una partizione del ricavato: metà al Comune, un quarto all'ufficiale inquirente, un quarto all'accusatore o delatore, se presente.⁵³ L'impressione allora è che ci si stesse gradatamente spostando verso quella che Biondi per Venezia ha chiamato la "sostenibilità delle multe", ovvero il calcolo oculatamente finalizzato dalle autorità competenti a che "le multe potessero essere pagate" da chi poteva pagarle, e che dunque costituissero un effettivo cespite per le casse pubbliche⁵⁴ ma anche un'entrata per provvedere alla *sovventione delle povere persone* e degli enti preposti allo scopo: a Perugia l'ospedale di S. Maria della Misericordia ma nel XV secolo una quota andava anche ai Monti di Pietà, o al rifacimento di cappelle e palazzi pubblici.⁵⁵

Il décalage rintracciabile nel testo perugino induce a fare un'ulteriore riflessione sul fatto che tra gli elementi ispiratori della normativa di pieno Trecento debba essere considerato anche l'aspetto demografico, legato alle conseguenze negative dei noti eventi catastrofici, conseguenze che potevano essere attenuate grazie all'introduzione di correttivi capaci di favorire una ripresa dei matrimoni e con essi delle nascite:⁵⁶ dunque, le commissioni preposte alla formulazione delle suntuarie puntarono sul contenimento delle spese per sponsali soprattutto in ordine alle doti, corredi e doni maritali, come possibile soluzione rispetto al fatto che poiché *homines depauperantur*, di conseguenza anche *matrimonia tardantur et peccata multiplicantur*.⁵⁷

Delle multe possiamo parlare in definitiva come ulteriore fattore di disuguaglianza perché toccavano soggetti con capacità economiche diverse: infatti, al di là delle proprietarie e dei proprietari dei beni, erano perseguiti anche – e in questo caso le multe erano davvero punitive – i ricamatori, i merciai, i calzolai e soprattutto i sarti e gli orefici, ovvero gli artigiani variamente coinvolti nella fattura degli abiti o degli ornamenti; per essi i sequestri di articoli o le pene pecuniarie elevate potevano costituire un rischio, che in genere si cercò di circoscrivere.⁵⁸

Infine, c'è da segnalare che le pene pecuniarie erano certamente le più diffuse a fronte di quelle personali, rare e previste solo per le prostitute (qualche colpo di frusta, ma in generale le *mulieres male fame* erano escluse dalle restrizioni), ed anche a fronte delle minacce della perdita del bene o dell'*offitio*

⁵³ Sul peso della delazione Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 66-9.

⁵⁴ Biondi, "Il prezzo del lusso," 122-3.

⁵⁵ Monacchia, "Perugia," 132; Monacchia, Nico Ottaviani, "Gli Osservanti e la legislazione suntuaria," 279-304; Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 64; Boldrini, *Per la storia delle leggi*, 282-91.

⁵⁶ Franceschi, "La normativa suntuaria nella storia economica," 170.

⁵⁷ Monacchia, "Perugia," 137.

⁵⁸ Franceschi, "La normativa suntuaria nella storia economica," 173.

et omni comodo o della cittadinanza o del rischio di un aumento dell'estimo relativamente ai mariti, padri consenzienti o *illi de domo mulieris*, tenuti a rispondere in solido delle inadempienze, talvolta proprio da loro incoraggiate in dispregio delle prammatiche.⁵⁹

In ultimo, riguardo alle pene spirituali, c'è da considerare la scomunica, non poi così temuta perché, comminata dal papa, spesso era da quello stesso sospesa su petizione delle autorità locali che in altre occasioni l'avevano invocata come efficace correttivo. Valgano a mo' di esempio il breve di Paolo II per le donne perugine prima colpite poi assolte dalla scomunica negli anni 1468-9 e quello di Giulio II per Foligno del 1513 annullato da Leone X nello stesso anno.⁶⁰

3. *Produttori di norme e contenuti*

Qualche considerazione è d'obbligo sui 'produttori' delle norme suntuarie e infine sul loro contenuto visto un po' più nei dettagli.

Quanto al primo punto, e ripetendo che la legislazione conobbe un grande incremento dall'età comunale in poi, non si può trascurare il sospetto di Ascheri circa l'esistenza di molto altro materiale precedente, andato purtroppo perduto: "norme oggetto di bandi non scritti, o di normative transitorie e congiunturali non sopravvissute alla selezione operata con la redazione degli statuti organici nel corso del Duecento".⁶¹ Ma un incremento si verificò, sostenuto e spinto da numerosi fattori, a partire da quello istituzionale che vide l'impallidire delle esperienze popolari verso varie soluzioni di stampo anche signorile;⁶² in ogni caso sempre la problematica suntuaria venne affidata a commissioni create appositamente dalle città per promulgare, ampliare, incrementare, correggere, riformare le norme finalizzate a contenere i dichiarati eccessi di 'ornato'.⁶³

Del tutto normale trovare nella composizione di quelle commissioni figure di spicco di giuristi già ampiamente utilizzati dai governi cittadini per la redazione degli statuti comunali e, accanto a quelli, famosi predicatori presenti per la loro qualità di 'autorità morali', dai più celebri come Bernardino da Siena, Giacomo della Marca o Giovanni da Capistrano – che tuonavano contro l'immobilizzazione di capitali in beni di lusso e accendevano i noti 'falò delle

⁵⁹ Nel 1537 i priori di Foligno si opporanno al fatto che tre cittadini di ambiente artigiano – sono vasai – *quali tutti sono transgressori della legge degli ornamenti, hanno fatto una borsia e mandano al legato prima, e poi a Roma, per non stare alle leggi del nostro comune e vogliono che ad ogni modo le loro donne et figlie vestano di drappi per onta del comune e delle altre donne*: Biviglia, Romani, Tedeschi, "Foligno," 450-1.

⁶⁰ Nico Ottaviani, "Introduzione," XXX.

⁶¹ Ascheri, "Tra storia giuridica e storia 'costituzionale'," 201.

⁶² Nico Ottaviani, "Introduzione," XX-XXI; Nico Ottaviani, "La disciplina del lusso," 37.

⁶³ Nico Ottaviani, XIX-XX; Nico Ottaviani, "La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria," 35-6. Per Siena: Ceppari Ridolfi, "Un caso toscano: Siena;" Ascheri, "La legislazione suntuaria a Siena."

vanità⁶⁴ –, agli epigoni più o meno noti ma molto solerti nelle file dell'Osservanza, spesso ispiratori della compilazione e della promozione di consistenti riforme posteriori.⁶⁵ Non bisogna dimenticare che i predicatori ora ricordati avevano ben presente l'erudizione classica come anche la tradizione moralistica, risalente quest'ultima almeno a Tertulliano e ai Padri della Chiesa, che volevano la donna modesta e vestita in modo da non suscitare né scandali né libidine.⁶⁶

Quanto ai contenuti della legislazione suntuaria, non si ripeterà mai abbastanza quanto essa fosse dettagliatissima dal momento che elencava in maniera ripetitiva particolari sulle fogge degli abiti sia maschili che, e soprattutto, femminili, sui tessuti, sugli ornamenti del petto, della testa, degli orli, delle maniche, dei colli, per non dire delle minuzie tutte analizzate delle scollature, degli strascichi, delle calzature troppo ornate come le pianelle, ma anche di collane, bracciali, anelli, di cui si stabilivano materiale, forma, peso e valore.⁶⁷ Ad ogni 'grado' sociale dovevano corrispondere fogge esclusive di abiti, taluni tipi di stoffe e non altre, certi ornamenti del capo, infine diversificate quantità di oro nei gioielli e nel numero degli anelli: erano questi dettagli – le 'apparenze' – che dovevano comunicare immediatamente e visivamente il 'grado' sociale.

A Perugia una deliberazione priorale, dopo aver dichiarato in apertura: *essendo condecene secondo la virtù et degnità se distinguano li gradi*, elenca a seguire un certo numero di distinzioni accomunate, almeno come proponimento di apertura, da una proibizione trasversale in ordine all'uso eccessivo di oro e argento per *li panni*, se pure poi si legge nel dettato normativo che *le donne de doctori et cavalieri serventi la dignità equestre* possono avere una *camorra d'oro o de argento et uno paro de manneche*, e *le spose et donne de gentilomini* [...] *uno paro de manneche d'oro o de argento* [...] e un *vestito et una camorra o de velluto o de seta*, e quasi negli stessi termini *le spose et donne de qualunque cetadino dal grado de li gentilomini in giù insino al grado de li artefici*, per le quali il vestito può essere solo di *rosato* e la camorra di velluto o seta; infine la *camorra* può essere di *rosato* e il vestito di *paonazzo* e le maniche di velluto o seta per le *spose et donne de li artefici*.⁶⁸ A tutte le donne e spose, escluse quelle degli artigiani, erano concessi *ornamenti de capo, de collo e pecto* con perle, gemme, oro e argento di valore fino a trenta fiorini, non più di tre anelli del valore complessivo di cinquanta fiorini, cin-

⁶⁴ Klaniczay, *The "Bonfires of Vanities,"* 31-60.

⁶⁵ Boldrini, *Per la storia delle leggi*, 39-87 e 87-96, sul trattato di Orfeo Cancellieri (*Tractatus de ornatu mulierum*); Nico Ottaviani, "Introduzione," XVIII-XIX; Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, 155-210.

⁶⁶ Boldrini, *Per la storia delle leggi*, 121-3; Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, 100-1; Nico Ottaviani, "De gli ariede e fregiature," 352-4.

⁶⁷ Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, 63-70.

⁶⁸ Monacchia, "Perugia," 150-2, 7 aprile 1506. Per *camorra* si intendeva una veste lunga a vita alta con maniche attaccate, *rosat* era un tessuto pregiato di color porpora, "*pavonazzo* era la sfumatura di rosso di tessuto di minore valore.

ture e balzi (acconciature) di broccato, velluto o seta. Le limitazioni, dunque, riguardavano in particolare le donne *de gli artifizii* alle quali erano concessi solo due anelli del valore di quattordici fiorini e cinture o altro ornamento non superiore a otto fiorini; infine, proibitissime per loro le perle, gemme, gioie e oro. Quanto alle doti, potevano arrivare a un massimo di cinquecento fiorini per i cittadini dei ceti più elevati, solo duecento per gli artigiani.⁶⁹

Anche a Foligno la distinzione era netta: le mogli, figlie, nuore, sorelle *de alcuno de l'ordine del consiglio* potevano portare ornamenti del corpo e della testa di argento, quattro onces di perle del valore di non più di dieci scudi, cuffie d'oro (cinque-sei scudi al massimo), una sola catena d'oro (quindici scudi), quattro anelli d'oro, mentre le stesse cose non erano concesse alle *donne de l'ordine del priorato*, e ancor meno alle *donne de artisciani* o infine alle *contadine* cui *non sia licito portare cose concesse a donne de consiglieri o a donne de l'ordine del priorato*.⁷⁰

In Assisi una commissione composta dai priori e da *cives* appositamente eletti stabilisce una scalarità di spese concesse per abiti femminili, *exceptis vestibus quotidianis*, dell'ordine di centocinquanta fiorini per le mogli di *equites, doctores, comites comitatus et viri nobiles dicte civitatis*, ottanta fiorini per i *populares*, settanta fiorini per *notari, mercatores et armigeri seu milites artem militarem exercentes*; e ancora quaranta fiorini per *artiste*, venticinque per *ceteri plebei* e quindici per i *comitatenses*, come sempre in fondo alla scala sociale. Erano contemplate anche alcune proibizioni – ma non per le signore del primo grado – riguardo all'uso di alcuni tessuti come il velluto consentito semmai in *manicis camorre*.⁷¹

La rigorosa precisione del dettato normativo è in totale attinenza, come detto, con una generalizzata avversione contro l'ostentazione di beni troppo preziosi e di materiali troppo costosi, ed è questa la cifra distintiva della normativa suntuaria perugina, e non solo, insieme al fatto che essa insisteva su quegli aspetti in relazione a eventi di grande 'visibilità' familiare come i matrimoni in occasione dei quali, come si è detto, il disciplinamento doveva riguardare *il sontuoso vestire delle donne* ma anche *le gran dote*, i conviti nuziali, i regali, i corredi.⁷² A Foligno le figlie dei consiglieri potevano essere dotate con ottocento fiorini e avere un *arredo* di ottanta, quelle dei priori con

⁶⁹ Su sarti e artigiani in genere, abili creatori non così profumatamente remunerati, si veda l'ampia casistica in Muzzarelli, "Consumi e livelli di vita," 464-71.

⁷⁰ Biviglia, Romani, Tedeschi, "Foligno," 463-5, 15 aprile 1549; Nico Ottaviani, "De gli ariede e fregiature," 343-50.

⁷¹ Monacchia, "Assisi," 263-5 e 269, 1468. Con il termine *artiste*, qui come a Perugia o Foligno, si intendevano gli iscritti ad un'arte: Monacchia, "Perugia," 224, nota 171. Il termine *populares* non aveva più il significato politico di pieno Trecento, in quanto la città, divisa tra le fazioni capeggiate dalle due famiglie nobili dei Fiumi e dei Nepis, conobbe una fase di pace sotto la signoria di Biordo Michelotti prima di subire la tragica distruzione operata dal perugino Niccolò Piccinino nel 1442: Sini, "Un esempio di dominio signorile," 85-94.

⁷² Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 201-22.

cinquecento e cinquanta per il corredo, infine le figlie di *artisciani e contadini civilitati* trecento per la dote e trenta per il corredo.⁷³

Le suntuarie perugine, assisane e folignati sopra ricordate sono solo un ridotto esempio delle molte che nel tempo marcarono le differenze cetuali attraverso i parametri ora visti: il numero e il valore delle vesti, delle fogge e delle stoffe, degli ornamenti e delle doti, in relazione a ben identificati posti nella scala sociale, ma prevedendo anche totali esclusioni nel caso de *li gentilhomini legitimi et naturali che hanno dominio di doi castelli o più, di XXV fochi l'uno* che erano a Perugia come a Orvieto e altrove *immuni et exceptonati de capitoli e obligationi*, e in questa privilegiata condizione li troviamo citati nelle fonti fino ad epoca tarda.⁷⁴ Quello che si vuole sottolineare attraverso gli esempi fatti è che le città – per dirla con Muzzarelli – ebbero il preciso intento di “mettere in forma la società governandone le apparenze” e condizionando “i comportamenti pubblici e privati” e non da ultimo traendo vantaggio dal “mancato rispetto delle norme”,⁷⁵ in quest’ultimo caso attraverso una “tassazione dei consumi”, favorevole per certi versi e pericolosa per altri.⁷⁶

In ultimo, la ripetitività delle norme e dei dettagli all’interno di esse ha posto alcuni quesiti circa l’applicazione e applicabilità di esse e dunque in generale circa l’efficacia/non efficacia della legislazione suntuaria; si tratta di un aspetto da ponderare attentamente dal momento che quella ripetitività, stimata spesso negativamente, può essere invece letta come segno di interesse pubblico; come ha scritto Ascheri, “si ritorna sempre su quello che per vari motivi preme sul piano ideale”.⁷⁷

4. *A mo' di conclusioni*

La legislazione suntuaria, proprio per la sua straordinaria continuità (XI-I-XVIII secolo), ha subito nel tempo inevitabili modificazioni. Non è facile dire se si trattò di evoluzioni o involuzioni: tutte comunque vanno collocate nei contesti che le progettarono e in relazione con le motivazioni che le determinarono, sostanzialmente di ordine politico, sociale e demografico. Pur non essendo un prodotto originale del medioevo (sono noti i precedenti in età romana repubblicana e imperiale), è dal Duecento almeno che le città cominciarono ad emanare queste norme che conosceranno uno straordinario incremento in età moderna.

⁷³ Biviglia, Romani, Tedeschi, “Foligno,” 463; Nico Ottaviani, “La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria,” 36-7.

⁷⁴ Monacchia, “Perugia,” 147; Fabretti, “Statuti e ordinamenti suntuari,” 213-5: “quei privilegi concessi ai magnati non furono più tolti dalle riforme suntuarie”.

⁷⁵ Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso*, 64, 225.

⁷⁶ Muzzarelli, “Un secolo (e passa) di studi,” 16-7; Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, 275.

⁷⁷ Ascheri, “Tra storia giuridica e storia ‘costituzionale,’” 206; Nico Ottaviani, “La legislazione suntuaria in Umbria,” 36-7; Boldrini, *Per la storia delle leggi*, 226-30.

Oggetto principale di interesse erano le donne, prevalentemente le cittadine, e il loro abbigliamento analizzato in tutti i suoi dettagli, specialmente in coincidenza con le rare occasioni di loro 'visibilità', fuori dalle pareti domestiche ma in importanti eventi familiari come i matrimoni, anch'essi da regolare. I soggetti promotori furono le città attraverso commissioni apposite formate da *cives* eminenti, giuristi, predicatori appositamente incaricati, con lo scopo di moderare comportamenti privati che potevano avere ricadute sulla sfera pubblica.

Una costante è certamente rintracciabile in tutta la normativa nel lunghissimo periodo e pur in contesti diversi: la critica, ma più ancora, la lotta dichiarata – almeno nelle intenzioni – contro l'ostentazione del lusso, della ricchezza, contro lo sperpero di denaro in vesti, tessuti, gioielli e ornamenti, in una parola l'‘ornato’ o ‘apparenze’, in specie nel timore che venissero in questo modo sottratti capitali a più cospicui impieghi pubblici. Ma si voleva contenere anche l'eccessiva ostentazione del proprio corpo o della propria bellezza attraverso scollature (che dunque dovevano essere molto contenute, due dita *sub furcula gule*), attraverso *caude* ovvero strascichi troppo lunghi o scarpe troppo alte (tutti elementi da ridurre).

I governi popolari tentarono di imporre un contenimento generalizzato verso il basso, quelli quattrocenteschi scelsero di indirizzarsi *ad status*, distinguendo a scalare diversi ‘gradi’ sociali a cui dovevano corrispondere diversi gradi o ‘tetti’ di ‘ornato’, focalizzando molta della loro attenzione sui *gentilhomini di doi castelli o più*, i veri esclusi da ogni restrizione e contenimento, quelli che più a lungo sono presenti nel dettato delle leggi. Dunque, le sontuarie furono uno strumento politico, un mezzo efficace per rafforzare gerarchie, per renderle riconoscibili, per comunicarle attraverso abiti e ornamenti.

A questa complessa gerarchia corrispondeva un altrettanto complesso sistema di punizioni, principalmente multe in denaro quantificate e graduate in base alla norma disattesa, multe che gli uomini di casa dovevano sborsare per le mogli, figlie ecc. inadempienti, il tutto finalizzato a favorire le casse cittadine ma anche enti preposti ad aiuti per i bisognosi.

Un'altra costante fu il contenimento del ‘lusso’ funebre, nelle vesti del morto, in quelle della vedova, nel numero delle candele, nella presenza dei preti, dei canti, dei partecipanti. E se è vero che anche in questo caso erano previste eccezioni (dottori, ecc.), pur tuttavia la normativa puntò generalmente verso il basso.

Infine, le distinzioni tra i gradi dell'apparire finirono per introdurre prevedibili e persistenti motivi di disuguaglianza, tra élite e non élite, tra i *gentilhomini* e gli esercitanti *le arti mecaniche*, tra cittadini e comitatini, i quali ultimi, con le loro mogli, troviamo limitatamente citati nel dettato della legge. Quando ciò avveniva (*li homini dei borghi o li contadini o i comitativi*), era per negare o ridurre al minimo gli elementi dell'‘apparire’.

In definitiva, le città realizzarono nel tempo una alchimia tra elementi che si presentavano come efficaci garanzie per la buona tenuta del governo e della pace della città, ovvero le dichiarate preoccupazioni in tema di ostentazione

di ricchezza unitamente a un bilanciato principio di applicata gradualità sociale e a un oculato impiego delle risorse. Il tutto sotto il collaudato ‘scudo’ della legislazione suntuaria che, seppur non sempre efficace, svolse comunque la sua funzione di strumento di governo, facilitando la coesistenza attraverso dettagliate distinzioni o, se vogliamo, disuguaglianze, e applicando il principio basilare e ripetuto all’infinito che *sopra tutto se distinguano li gradi secondo la virtù e la dignità*.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Nico Ottaviani, “La disciplina del lusso,” 40.

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Stratificazioni sociali, percezione della bellezza urbana e costruzione del consenso (città italiane, secoli XIII-XIV)

di Gabriella Piccinni

La bellezza delle città italiane tra fine XIII e inizio XIV secolo non avrebbe potuto essere costruita senza qualche forma di largo consenso. Costruita con impegno di denaro pubblico, tutelata con regolamenti che dettarono i criteri per guidare e poi conservare il disegno urbano, ricercata per coltivare la reputazione, essa era fatta di architetture pubbliche e mura imponenti ma pervadeva anche i luoghi della quotidianità, le strade, le fontane, gli ospedali... rispondendo a un crescente desiderio di organizzare, dare funzionalità, igiene e decoro. Ci si chiede se tale bellezza fosse anche contenitore di messaggi che miravano alla costruzione di un consenso politico trasversale ai vari gradini sociali. E se fosse percepita e generasse senso di appartenenza in tutti i cittadini, andando anche al di là delle diseguaglianze economiche e delle differenze di ceto.

The beauty of the Italian cities of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries would not have been built without a sort of large consensus. This beauty was built with public funds, protected by regulations designed to guide and preserve urban design, and sought to enhance the city's reputation. It consisted of public buildings and imposing walls, but it also permeated the places of everyday life, such as streets, fountains, hospitals, etc. In this respect, this beauty responded to a growing need to organize the city, to make it functional and to improve hygiene and urban decorum. The question arises as to whether this beauty was a container for messages to build a political consensus across the different social strata. It is also questionable whether this beauty was perceived and whether it created a sense of belonging among the city's inhabitants beyond the existing economic and social inequalities.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, città comunali italiane, bellezza urbana, consenso politico, stratificazioni sociali.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Italian city-communes, urban decorum, political consensus, social stratification.

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1. *Bellezza e ricerca del consenso*

Mi sono spesso interrogata su cosa spinse le città italiane, tra la fine del XIII e l'inizio del XIV secolo, verso la loro splendida bellezza. Mi sono anche chiesta se essa avrebbe potuto essere realizzata senza il sostegno di qualche forma di consenso. Mi sono chiesta soprattutto quanto questo consenso potesse essere profondo (cioè quanto penetrasse nei diversi strati sociali, gruppi di ceti, di reddito, o se si limitasse alle élite politiche e ai loro circoli ristretti); quanto esteso (cioè quanto fosse in grado di coinvolgere un numero significativo di individui o parti interessate, donne e uomini); quanto consapevolmente perseguito; quanto il linguaggio della bellezza fosse parte di un progetto politico per rivolgersi al popolo tutto, anche nei suoi strati più bassi.

L'obiettivo non è facile da centrare. Si tratta, infatti, di catturare qualcosa dei processi mentali attraverso i quali cittadini di diverso livello sociale, economico e culturale potrebbero aver conferito significati particolari ai dati sensoriali proposti dall'ambiente costruito,¹ alle immagini di manufatti o luoghi 'piacevoli' o funzionali con le quali il potere, parlando all'immaginazione più che all'intelletto, provava a raggiungere anche "gli scontenti nella società urbana".² Ma, come ha scritto Umberto Eco, purtroppo "i contadini, i muratori, i panettieri o i sarti hanno fatto delle cose che forse consideravano anche belle, ma [...] non hanno mai scritto nulla per dirci se e perché considerassero belle queste cose, o per dirci che cos'era per essi il bello naturale".³

Nel 2020 e poi di nuovo nel 2023 Chiara Ferragni, rinomata *influencer*, è stata fotografata nelle sale di un museo italiano, paragonata alla Venere di Sandro Botticelli quando ha visitato gli Uffizi di Firenze e alla Maestà di Simone Martini come 'sua maestà Ferragni' nel Museo Civico di Siena. Subito si è scatenata la discussione. Da una parte vediamo l'arte trattata come un prodotto da consumare e operazioni di mercato che sfruttano la bellezza delle città con l'obiettivo di vendere meglio una merce; dall'altra c'è l'uso di linguaggi comunicativi allettanti per un pubblico giovane, ma ritenuti poco attenti ai contenuti e inadatti a stimolare il pensiero critico. La pubblicità è però qualcosa con cui la città deve fare i conti, perché ne ha rappresentato la 'seconda pelle' fin da quando si è cercato di far prevalere l'immagine di un certo prodotto su quella di un altro simile.⁴ La discussione sembra assestata, oggi, almeno su un punto, e cioè che il marchio delle città italiane, con la loro reputazione durevole, sembra più forte di quello legato alla fuggevole vita dei social e che, dunque, non è una delle belle tra le belle città ad avvantaggiarsi di un effimero idolo di passaggio ma piuttosto il contrario: riconoscimento, questo, della forza comunicativa che ancora scaturisce dal superbo patrimo-

¹ Comba, "La città come spazio."

² "Gli scontenti nella società urbana" difficilmente "potevano accontentarsi del decoro", scrive Cherubini, "La ricerca del decoro urbano," 379.

³ Eco, *Storia della bellezza*.

⁴ De Martino, "Città pubblicitarie," 189-95.

nio architettonico e artistico che da secoli plasma l'immagine e la reputazione delle città italiane, in grado ancora oggi di veicolare messaggi positivi anche a gente comune che occupa posizioni mediamente basse nella scala culturale o a giovani utenti dei social media.

Succedeva qualcosa di simile anche quando tutta questa bellezza veniva costruita? I nostri avi riassunsero tutto l'insieme di percezioni, pratiche politiche, dati reali e aspirazioni che riguardavano le loro città con parole come 'bellezza' (o *pulchritudo* e *forma* in latino).⁵ Naturalmente sappiamo bene che 'bellezza' non è mai una parola semplice da pronunciare, che nel tempo le sono stati attribuiti molti significati diversi e che, nel caso delle città, è stata usata soprattutto per descriverle nel loro insieme più che nelle loro singole parti.

2. Le nuove mura, segni identitari e luoghi di conflitto

Tra le cesure create dall'aumento del numero degli abitanti delle città, moltiplicati per tre o anche cinque volte nell'arco di pochi decenni durante la lunga età della crescita (dal XII al XIV secolo),⁶ c'è quella determinata dall'inesorabile saturazione degli spazi all'interno delle mura antiche e dall'aumento dei valori immobiliari.⁷ Le autorità delle città capirono presto che c'era bisogno di nuove case, e infatti ampliare il circuito delle mura aveva significato incorporare sia abitazioni già da qualche tempo esistenti al loro esterno sia terreni edificabili liberi⁸ dove indirizzare i nuovi arrivati, campagnoli destinati a inserirsi tra le maestranze o tra i mendicanti se più poveri, a sottoporsi al fisco cittadino se benestanti e proprietari.

Con le mura nuove, più imponenti e più ornate delle precedenti, la città esibisce la sua potenza facendone un tassello non secondario della costruzione della sua reputazione verso l'esterno. Dino Compagni racconta che le mura di Pistoia assediata nel 1306 dai fiorentini *furono dirupinate* dagli assediati che *non perdonarono alla bellezza della città, che come villa disfatta rimase*.⁹ Le mura, dunque, vengono abbattute per dare un segno concreto e percepibile della capitolazione. La cosa interessante è che proprio quella bellezza eccessiva della città assediata sia considerata una sfida per la bellissima città assediante, segno di colpa tanto dolorosa e imperdonabile da meritare durissima mortificazione. In questo caso, dunque, alle mura viene affidata un'idea

⁵ Molti studiosi hanno parlato della bellezza delle città, nelle varie accezioni di decoro, igiene, ordine. Ricordo solo, come capostipite di questi studi, il saggio del 1940 di Ottokar, "Criteri d'ordine," e la recente sintesi di Maire Vigueur, *Così belle così vicine*.

⁶ Vedi Hubert, "La construction de la ville," 113-4.

⁷ Hubert, "Urbanisation, propriété," 1-8.

⁸ In varie città sono testimoniati spazi vuoti interni alle mura allargate, cito ad esempio: Hubert, "L'organizzazione territoriale;" Varanini, "L'espansione urbana di Verona;" Piccinni, "Pieni e vuoti nelle città."

⁹ Compagni, *Cronica*, 41 (I, 139).

di bellezza trionfante e alla loro distruzione il significato di una punizione vergognosa.

Le mura, definendo in modo spaziale chi viene accettato come membro della comunità, hanno un ruolo fondamentale nella costruzione della nuova identità civica.¹⁰ Esempio lampante è la riedificazione delle mura di Milano abbattute dal Barbarossa,¹¹ trasformata nell'esibizione di una gloria patriottica e civile. La città, durante il lungo assedio, aveva modificato la propria forma costruendo un fossato a protezione delle case esterne all'antica cerchia ed è quel nuovo tracciato a essere ripreso al momento della ricostruzione fisica e morale della città, nel 1171. In quell'occasione la nuova Porta Romana viene abbellita con un bassorilievo che propone il racconto del rientro dei cittadini esuli, alcuni di condizione modesta, gruppi familiari con animali, gente che regge sulla spalla un bastone e un fagotto al modo dei contadini, manifestando l'intento di coinvolgere nella fierezza del ricordo i ceti sociali più bassi e gli immigrati dalla campagna.¹²

Con la crescita della popolazione nelle città iniziano ad agire nuove forze divisive. Gli spazi vengono ridefiniti in base alla loro ubicazione all'interno e all'esterno delle mura, e la toponomastica amministrativa registra fedelmente il doppio sviluppo: per designare le case esterne al nucleo antico si diffonde un po' ovunque in Italia l'uso della parola 'borgo', conservata anche dopo l'annessione definita allo spazio urbano. In altri casi gli immigrati ricevono lotti edificabili ricavati addirittura colmando le fosse adiacenti alle mura.¹³ È così che i cittadini originari devono mettersi ogni volta in cerca dei confini che identifichino sé e gli altri, di chiarirsi dove passa ogni nuova linea di separazione fisica e giuridica degli abitanti della campagna da quelli della città,¹⁴ unici questi ultimi protetti dalle sue leggi e inseriti nella sfera di intervento dei suoi ufficiali: perché si tratta di definire dove finisce la nuova città e inizia il contado attraverso la linea d'ombra detta 'suburbio', dunque letteralmente 'sotto la città'.¹⁵ Una sintesi perfetta di cosa rappresenti quel confine la dobbiamo a Dante che, oltre ad aver creato il neologismo 'inurbarsi', chiama i cittadini *quei ch'un muro e una fossa serra* (*Purgatorio*, VI e XXVI).

Nei decenni della maturità legislativa, gli statuti rispecchiano tale progressiva costruzione e distinguono ancora zone vecchie e nuove, segno di quanto faticoso sia stato prendere atto dell'annessione di gente nuova nel corpo urbano. Nei fatti il processo non è stato infatti indolore. Incontriamo epi-

¹⁰ Menzinger, "Mura e identità civica," 78-80.

¹¹ Ferrari, La "politica in figure", 37.

¹² Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 201-3. I fregi sono oggi conservati nel Museo del Castello Sforzesco.

¹³ Scharf, *Potere e società ad Arezzo*, 49.

¹⁴ Grohmann, *La città medievale*, 35.

¹⁵ Per le varie definizioni delle fasce suburbane (*burgi*, *suburgi*, *suburbia*, *appendicia*, *confines*, *vicinancia*, *adiacences*) vedi Bocchi, "Suburbi e fasce suburbane," 15-33. Per le definizioni di *burgus* (anche *burgus qui foris est seu extra urbem*) e *suburbium* vedi Du Cange et al., *Glossarium*, s.v.

sodi di occupazioni abusive e segni di microconflittualità: ad esempio quando a Perugia nel 1223 gruppi di immigrati intorno alle nuove case iniziano autonomamente a costruire mura o a scavare fossati che vengono poi obbligati a distruggere o a colmare;¹⁶ oppure quando nel 1290 altri immigrati in Firenze sradicano da terra i ‘termini’,¹⁷ cioè i ceppi e picchetti di confine che segnano i lotti che si vorrebbero far loro acquistare lungo una strada nuova fuori delle mura antiche.¹⁸ In altre città si segnala il confinamento di intere comunità di inurbati in zone obbligate, in altre gruppi di compaesani che, arrivati a tappe, si organizzano per vivere gomito a gomito. A Firenze nel 1297¹⁹ gruppi di immigrati affittano insieme alcuni immobili, magari continuando a menzionare le proprie origini nel nome proprio o in quello del quartiere dove sono andati a vivere. In altri ancora ricevono lotti edificabili in aree designata dalle autorità cittadine (come a Fabriano negli anni Venti del XIII secolo o a Imola nel 1312).²⁰ Così è accaduto, per fare un altro vistoso esempio, quando nel 1253 gruppi di abitanti si sono trasferiti da circa settanta castelli verso un nuovo insediamento che diverrà la città dell’Aquila, e ogni gruppo è andato ad abitare in un quartiere prefissato.²¹ La stessa cosa accade a Scarperia, un mercatale del Fiorentino fondato all’inizio del XIV secolo, dove i quartieri vengono intitolati ai santi protettori dei villaggi di origine, mentre a Terranuova Bracciolini, addirittura, ogni quartiere nuovo ha una chiesa intitolata come quella della località di partenza.²² Così ad Arezzo dove nel 1327 l’inurbato deve andare ad abitare in quel quartiere la cui porta sia unita alla *viscontaria* o *cortina* nella quale sorge il suo villaggio di provenienza, con un solo quartiere aperto a tutti.²³

In mezzo a uno spazio urbano già solidamente organizzato per *vicinie* e in attesa che i nuovi quartieri vengano stabilmente accettati nella vita della collettività, compresi i cerimoniali religiosi o carnevaleschi,²⁴ immaginiamo facilmente che vivere vicini consenta agli inurbati di fronteggiare la prima fase della precarietà.

¹⁶ Grohmann, *Città e territorio*, t. 1, 4 e Grohmann, *Perugia*, 26.

¹⁷ Pomierny-Wąsińska, “Mensurationes.”

¹⁸ Sznura, *L’espansione urbana di Firenze*, 61.

¹⁹ Sznura, 140.

²⁰ Pirani, *Fabriano in età comunale*, 28-9; Pini, *La popolazione di Imola*, 21.

²¹ Figliuolo, “Terre nuove,” 239-40.

²² Moretti, Le “terre nuove,” 51.

²³ *Statuto di Arezzo (1327)*, 104: utilizzato da Balestracci, “Immigrazione e morfologia,” 89-90. Per il XII secolo vedi Scharf, *Potere e società ad Arezzo*, 48.

²⁴ Gazzini, “Luoghi e rituali,” 73-94.

3. Regole per una crescita ordinata e per la modernizzazione della città storica

Le città si danno presto un sistema di regole per la crescita²⁵ perché prendono molto presto consapevolezza dell'impatto dei cambiamenti in atto. Un anziano cittadino di Vercelli, ad esempio, nel 1196 ha raccontato al giudice ciò che ricordava di quando lui era bambino e la città aveva una forma diversa dalla attuale, *civitas non erat ex ea forma qua modo est*.²⁶ E in effetti le mura assorbite nei nuovi disegni urbani e le porte interne che vanno in disuso descrivono il momento in cui il processo di annessione è concluso. Si pensi ai bolognesi che nel 1206 iniziano ad abbattere le mura antiche e più interne colmandone i fossati per facilitare la fusione del vecchio nucleo con i nuovi borghi;²⁷ o a Siena dove, nel XIII secolo, le *murella* antiche sono ancora in piedi e distinte dalle mura più moderne²⁸ e i battenti della porta Salaria, rimasta interna alla città ampliata, vengono rimossi in modo da consentire il comodo accesso dalla città vecchia al mercato che si stende ora a valle, nel Campo;²⁹ o a Firenze dove certi fossati in origine esterni alle mura nel 1291 sono ormai ridotti *in ortis et terra nigra*.³⁰

In una città che si espande continuamente, altrettanto continuamente si ripone anche il problema di "modernizzare la città storica":³¹ per fare un esempio, a Vicenza molto presto, dal XII al XIII secolo, la struttura originaria ad assi ortogonali viene integrata nella tendenza radiale della città medievale.³² Favoriti dalla densità delle abitazioni, anche certi incendi disastrosi (migliaia di case bruciate a Firenze nel 1304),³³ alluvioni che distruggono prima di tutto le strutture in materiali deperibili nelle zone più depresse delle città allagate (nel caso di Firenze l'alluvione è *quasi uno rimutamento di secolo*),³⁴ terremoti,³⁵ assalti militari³⁶ incoraggiano le ristrutturazioni e il boom edilizio.

È in questo contesto che si inizia a elaborare il criterio guida della bellezza delle città. A Pisa già dal 1160 il *Constitutum usus* prescrive interventi *nec*

²⁵ Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 331, 366.

²⁶ Gullino, *Uomini e spazio urbano*, 64; Gullino, "Vercelli nel XII secolo," 499.

²⁷ Pini, "Bologna 1211," 193-222.

²⁸ Ciampoli, Szabò, *Viabilità e legislazione*, 161.

²⁹ *Il Constituto del comune di Siena*, 294 (d. III, r. 68).

³⁰ Sznura, *L'espansione urbana di Firenze*, 85-6.

³¹ Usa "modernizzare la città storica" Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, capitolo 4.

³² Scuro, "Disegnare Vicenza," 22.

³³ Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. 2, 132-5 (IX, 71); Contessa, *L'Ufficio del Fuoco*.

³⁴ Sulle alluvioni fiorentine del Due e Trecento: Salvestrini, *Liberata città*; Salvestrini, "L'Arno e l'alluvione;" Salvestrini, "Les inondations;" Schenk, "... Prima ci fu la cagione;" Schenk, "L'alluvione del 1333;" Frati, "Questo diluvio;" Bianca, Salvestrini, *L'acqua nemica*.

³⁵ A Siena dopo il terremoto del 1320 si intensificò la sorveglianza sugli edifici pericolanti: Archivio di Stato di Siena (ASS), Biccherna, 543-4. Vedi anche Arrighetti, *Siena e i terremoti*.

³⁶ L'assalto a Vicenza ordinato dall'imperatore nel 1236 provocò l'incendio dei palazzi comunali e di molte case-torri: Scuro, "Disegnare Vicenza," 23.

minuantur aspectus pulcherrimus civitatis,³⁷ a Siena nel 1334 sono al lavoro *ufficiali sopra le beleze de la città*. Gli esempi si potrebbero moltiplicare. La valenza estetica degli interventi non sembra determinata dal singolo monumento ma dall'insieme, e garantita da principi di conservazione – e non di cambiamento – di ciò che via via viene costruito. Sembra delinearsi dunque la consapevolezza che, negli anni della crescita le città stanno conseguendo una 'forma' e un 'aspetto' – e probabilmente anche un equilibrio sociale – positivi, fatti di un buon rapporto tra pieni e vuoti e in molti casi completati dal profilo signorile delle torri. Sta di fatto che quell'immagine equilibrata e bella, via via consolidata e apprezzata, va custodita e protetta, e anche di questo non mancano testimonianze. E dunque l'appello, frequente nei documenti pubblici, a non 'deformare' la città suggerisce di aver cura perché essa non solo non divenga più brutta ma nemmeno si alteri nel rapporto complessivo tra pieni e vuoti che ne determina l'aspetto bello.³⁸ A Vicenza nel 1264 nessun edificio può essere abbattuto se non per motivi di sicurezza, escludendo dunque motivazioni di natura penale o 'guasti' punitivi.³⁹ Negli statuti di Lucca del 1308 si scrive che la città non deve essere sfigurata (*deformata*) abbattendo case o torri senza autorizzazione.⁴⁰ A Roma nel 1363 le autorità municipali proteggono gli edifici antichi ponendo attenzione sul danneggiamento dell'immagine che può derivare dell'uso commerciale dei resti marmorei, ormai radicato, per cui si vieta, *ne ruynis civitatis deformetur*, di abbattere qualunque *anticuum hedificium Urbis*.⁴¹

4. La bellezza, una ricerca consapevole estesa ai luoghi del quotidiano

Nella fase espansiva, quando le città hanno raggiunto una 'grandezza' che non è misurabile solo col perimetro delle mura, la bellezza viene cercata con grande dispendio di denaro pubblico. In questa fase le cose non sono belle in sé, quanto grazie al consenso che ne ricava chi ci impegna le sue energie e i suoi soldi. Così tra la fine del XII e i primi del XIII secolo le riunioni dei consigli e gli uffici di governo vengono accolti in bei palazzi, partendo dall'area lombarda, sedi monumentali e più imponenti del bisogno reale rispetto alle modeste *domus* precedenti.⁴² Con lo stesso spirito vengono costruite le grandi piazze pubbliche e le cattedrali ovunque sono riprogettate e abbellite come luoghi di incontro e di solennità.

³⁷ *Constitutum usus*, 955.

³⁸ ASS, Biccherna, 181, cc. 42r-v, 12 novembre 1334.

³⁹ Scuro, "Disegnare Vicenza," 71.

⁴⁰ *Statuto del Comune di Lucca*, 287.

⁴¹ Ait, "Dal riuso ai nuovi materiali," 205.

⁴² Moretti, "I palazzi pubblici;" Gabrielli, "Palazzi e torri pubbliche;" Gabrielli, "Piazze e palazzi comunali;" Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 213-48.

Molti interventi delineavano un'idea di bellezza che pervade anche i luoghi della quotidianità: le strade, le fontane, gli ospedali e tutte quelle strutture di pubblica utilità che rispondono a un crescente desiderio di organizzare, dare funzionalità, igiene e decoro.

I valori estetici ispirano gli atti di governo e le normative riguardanti le strade di molte città italiane. Tra il XIII secolo e i primi decenni del XIV migliora la viabilità, si pavimentano, raddrizzano e ampliano le strade tortuose, e qua e là prendono vita i primi regolamenti del sistema viario: a Treviso (1211), a Milano (1272), a Siena (1290), a Spoleto (1296).⁴³ In particolare, in modo martellante, si ripete che le strade urbane devono essere prima di tutto più luminose, e che per questo occorre allargarle, controllare superfetazioni aeree degli edifici e illuminarle nella notte, garantendo onestà e decoro: gli statuti di Firenze impongono a chi abiti in una strada buia di appendere un lume alla porta.⁴⁴

Il principale principio edilizio e urbanistico della città in costruzione è la ricerca della linea retta: ogni volta che si corregge il percorso di una strada una serie di punti vengono collegati *a corda et recta linea* trasformando le tecniche costruttive antiche in principi di ordine. Anche il raddrizzamento progressivo, se e dove possibile, delle strade più antiche è testimoniato in molti luoghi: ad esempio fra il 1250 e il 1266 vengono deliberati più di 1000 interventi su singoli punti di Bologna⁴⁵ mentre da fine Duecento e nei primi del Trecento se ne registrano molti a Siena e a Firenze, le cui strade *assistrae, amplae et rectae* o addirittura *pulcherrime*, sono *decora*, servono alla *pulchritudo civitatis*, rispetto ad altre sordide, turpi, fetide e inoneste.⁴⁶

Le strade devono cercare un tracciato più lineare per motivi pratici, per facilitare il passaggio a persone e merci. Ma c'è di più. Belle sono le strade rette e larghe ma anche pulite e sgombre, così come le piazze e i ponti, e quella pulizia non è un semplice principio di igiene o una salvaguardia della viabilità ma anche *ricreatio civium*.⁴⁷ Anche di questo abbiamo ampie testimonianze. Nel 1325 gli abitanti di Parma desiderano avere le strade le vie *pulchre* e *necte* perché il passaggio delle persone non sia impedito dal fango o dalla sporcizia;⁴⁸ *boni homines* devono occuparsi nel 1287 del decoro di Ferrara rimuovendo i rifiuti dalle strade (e dunque i legislatori ferraresi instaurano una connessione diretta tra problema dello smaltimento dei rifiuti e immagine decorosa dell'ambiente urbano);⁴⁹ a Firenze negli anni 1322-5 via Maggio è descritta come *ampla et pulcra satis*.⁵⁰

⁴³ Bocchi, 359 sgg.

⁴⁴ Sull'illuminazione pubblica: Del Bo, *L'età del lume*, 151-8.

⁴⁵ Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 360. Vedi anche Pini, *Città, comuni e corporazioni*; 22-46; Bocchi, "Normativa urbanistica."

⁴⁶ Ottokar, "Criteri d'ordine," 143-9.

⁴⁷ Rocchigiani, "Urbanistica ed igiene," 387; Ascheri, "Le più antiche norme," 267.

⁴⁸ Greci, "Il problema dello smaltimento," 448.

⁴⁹ Greci, 439.

⁵⁰ Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 362.

Così le vie diritte, ampie, pulite, sgombre, utili e belle, comode e luminose sono annoverate tra le bellezze più evidenti delle città (*vie ample, clare et commodite constructe inter alias pulcritudines civitatum magis appareant*,⁵¹ 1334): nel microcosmo che popola le strade l'idea della bellezza contiene insieme l'idea della funzionalità e quella del decoro, della pulizia e dell'assenza di pericolo.

Ci sono da ricordare altri luoghi che appartengono alla quotidianità dei diversi strati sociali e che sono oggetto di particolare cura, sia funzionale che estetica. Ne ricordo almeno due.

Il desiderio che le cose utili alla vita della gente comune siano anche belle è espresso attraverso le fontane monumentali costruite tra Due e Trecento, in modo particolarmente insistito in città che non dispongono di corsi di acqua dolce perché nelle altre bastano i pozzi a dissetare la gente. Facili esempi sono le due splendide fontane di Perugia e il sistema delle fonti monumentali senesi che, come terminali esterni di sofisticate reti sotterranee, con la loro bellezza danno pieno merito a ciò che non è visivamente percepibile, quale elemento qualificante e rappresentativo per l'intera comunità. Sotto, gli ingegneri, sopra gli architetti e gli scultori; davanti e in mezzo a tutta questa maestria gli uomini e le donne che attingono acqua da bere, lavano i panni, abbeverano gli animali, bagnano le lane e le pelli.

È vistosa, poi, la cura architettonica di tanti edifici dove si organizzano l'assistenza e l'erogazione del credito solidale.⁵² Trasformati con il mutare dei bisogni, resi via via maestosi nelle città più grandi, arricchiti da opere d'arte, oggetti e mobili, altari e reliquie che attestano patrimoni devozionali preziosi per ostentare l'istituzione stessa e i suoi benefattori, questi complessi edilizi accrescono la reputazione che lubrifica il flusso delle donazioni e rappresentano, almeno dal XIII secolo in poi, nuclei di protezione sociale ben riconoscibili in punti nevralgici dello spazio urbano, scenari di solenni cerimonie pubbliche,⁵³ frequentati da varie figure di assistenti e di assistiti, bisognosi, malati, viaggiatori, bambini, donne sole, o che abbandonano i figli che non possono mantenere, o volontarie, o inservienti, o balie... rispondendo così al precetto di assistere i 'poveri', parola con la quale si indica tutta la società del bisogno e si riassume la loro ragione sociale. I luoghi dell'assistenza ricoprono un ruolo nei processi di definizione del sentimento di appartenenza civica e contribuiscono al modo in cui agli abitanti, anche di strati sociali bassi, viene proposto di percepire le città, nei loro quotidiani bisogni.⁵⁴ Perché in questa fase i poveri non vengono ancora nascosti, non c'è bisogno di distinguerli fisicamente da chi ozia "sulle spalle del lavoro altrui", per usare parole di Martin

⁵¹ ASS, Consiglio Generale, 116, c. 42v, 24 novembre 1334.

⁵² Piccinni, "Introduzione," 11-34.

⁵³ Henderson, *L'ospedale rinascimentale*, 120. Anche altre istituzioni caritative come i Monti di Pietà si trovano in posizione centrale: Avallone, "Introduzione," 10.

⁵⁴ Pinto, *Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza*, 166 ricorda cronisti del XIII-XV che per descrivere le città ne valorizzano gli ospedali.

Lutero,⁵⁵ il ribrezzo per la loro scarsa igiene non fa ancora da spartiacque tra le categorie sociali come avverrà in piena età moderna.⁵⁶ I poveri sono invece esibiti – e non ancora reclusi – in edifici che danno ‘decoro’ alle città,⁵⁷ come testimoni di una società che include le proprie debolezze in una visione globale. Dunque, anche lo sforzo per sostenere le miserie dei più deboli può essere considerato un contributo a quella epidemia dell’identità chiamata orgoglio cittadino cui si chiede di agire da collante sociale,⁵⁸ e i begli edifici dell’assistenza contribuiscono al modo in cui la città viene percepita dai suoi abitanti e dai forestieri che li descrivono nei loro diari.⁵⁹

5. La città delle differenze

La città non è omogenea, come del resto non lo è la società urbana. Nelle città dell’espansione ci sono i ricchi, i benestanti, gli arricchiti, i colpiti da fenomeni di mobilità discendente (ne sono prova gli istituti che si occupano dei ‘poveri vergognosi’),⁶⁰ i lavoratori poveri. Anche il numero di coloro che vivono di elemosina sembra nell’ordine di decina di migliaia: nel 1302 viene presentata una supplica al Comune di Siena a nome di 15.000 poveri per i quali anche la carità dei privati si è interrotta a causa della carestia;⁶¹ nel 1311 poveri di Parma *in infinito numero* piangono e urlano per le piazze e muoiono di fame in strada, vicino ad altri senza lavoro;⁶² durante la carestia del 1330, Giovanni Villani racconta che nella bellissima Firenze soffrono la fame 17.000 poveri *tra maschi e femmine piccioli e grandi, senza i poveri vergognosi e quegli degli spedali e pregioni e religiosi mendicanti* provenienti da varie parti della Toscana per rispondere a un bando per la distribuzione di un’elemosina; e *senza numero* sono sempre in Firenze *i poveri che vivevano di limosine* durante quella del 1346.⁶³ Per quanto possano essere enfaticizzati e per quanto si immagini che in anni di carestia vi si comprendano anche tanti lavoratori solo momentaneamente impoveriti,⁶⁴ si tratta comunque di numeri

⁵⁵ Pinto, 105.

⁵⁶ Ora Prosperi, *Un volgo disperso*.

⁵⁷ Santoro, “Abbellire Palermo.”

⁵⁸ Zdekauer, “I primordi;” Pinto, “Il personale;” Albini, *Città e ospedali*, 133-4.

⁵⁹ Vari esempi in Henderson, *L’ospedale rinascimentale*, 108, 111.

⁶⁰ Albini, “Declassamento sociale,” 75. Ricci, “Naissance du pauvre honteux;” Ricci, “Povertà, vergogna;” Balestracci, “I lavoratori poveri;” Mollat, *I poveri nel Medioevo*, 191; Vauchez, “Sainteté laïque,” 27, 32. Il termine fa la sua prima apparizione in Lombardia nel 1260: Pecchiai, “I documenti nella biografia,” 112-4. Si veda anche il capitolo di Laurent Feller in questo volume.

⁶¹ ASS, Consiglio Generale, 61, cc. 133v-136v, 21 giugno 1302.

⁶² *Chronica Parmensia*, 400-44: 406.

⁶³ Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. 2, 725 (XI, 153); vol. 3, 470 (XIII, 73). Per un’equilibrata discussione della testimonianza del Villani vedi de La Roncière, “Poveri e povertà a Firenze,” 206-7.

⁶⁴ Mollat, *I poveri nel Medioevo*, 185-98 ha chiamato i nuovi indigenti “povertà laboriosa.” Ritorna sul tema Franceschi, “Introduzione,” 9.

impressionanti che parlano delle responsabilità della crescita duecentesca nei processi di sradicamento e declassamento delle popolazioni.

Nell'aprile 1311 il consiglio del Popolo espelle da Bologna e dal suo contado tutte le bocche ritenute di peso in una situazione di carestia, cioè forestieri, 'banditi' bianchi ghibellini provenienti dal ferrarese ai quali si danno tre giorni di tempo per andarsene.⁶⁵ È aprile anche quando, nel 1329, il popolo di Siena affamato *romorò, e corse con furore sul Campo unde e Signori ebero gran paura che Siena non fusse messa a sacco dai povari*, dando vita ad un tumulto nato davanti alle porte dell'Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala dove gli ospedalieri hanno sospeso l'elemosina dei pani. La sommossa viene sedata, secondo il cronista senese Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, solo quando il governo obbliga i rettori degli ospedali civici a scendere nel Campo, perché *con buone parole li conduceessero a l'ospedale e li contentassero, e così fecero dicendo: 'Venga ogniuno che lo' daremo del pane quanto vorrete, e non fate romore, e uno a uno ogniuno n'arà*. Domenico Lenzi, che vende grano sul mercato fiorentino di Orsammichele, racconta invece che i perfidi cittadini senesi hanno espulso i poveri poi accolti e sfamati alle porte accoglienti di Firenze.⁶⁶

Nemmeno sappiamo in quali aree e in quali case vivono tutti quei poveri. Un divario è marcato dall'uso di materiali diversi, la pietra o il mattone per le abitazioni più ricche, il legno o la terra per le altre e poi le case basse della gente comune e quelle alte dei più benestanti. A Siena nel 1309-10 si dettano principi estetici non solo per gli edifici imponenti che affacciano sui grandi spazi monumentali ma anche per tutte le nuove abitazioni, anche quelle costruite in terra battuta, che dovranno avere almeno i pilastri e *facce dinançi* in mattoni a coprirli e dare solidità, per puntare ad una medesima qualità estetica, prescrivendo *che la casa la quale si murasse di terra ne la città et borghi, abbia la faccia di mattoni*⁶⁷ *accioché cotali case rendano belleça a la città*.⁶⁸ L'opposto del bello, dunque, può essere umile ma non vuole però contenere il brutto, perché comunque lo scarto tra edifici magnifici e povere case deve essere compatibile con una percezione egualitaria della *civitas*.

Di come la stratificazione sociale abbia lasciato il suo segno nello spazio delle città in espansione⁶⁹ è utile esporre qualche dato. A Bologna, alla fine del XIII secolo, nella fascia medio-bassa dei proprietari di immobili si trovano i maestri muratori che con le loro modeste proprietà – la casa di abitazione, e magari una vigna o un campetto – costituiscono una sorta di aristocra-

⁶⁵ Braidi, "Le rivolte del pane."

⁶⁶ Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, Cronaca senese, 484-5; Pinto, *Il libro del biadaio*, 318-22. La vicenda è ricostruita anche da Pellegrini, "Le limosine di messer Giovanni," 1005.

⁶⁷ Il Costituto del Comune di Siena, t. 2, d. III, r. 37; t. 2, d. V, r. 409. Talvolta le norme si basano su altre precedenti: Szabò, "Lo spazio pubblico," 171.

⁶⁸ *Il Costituto del Comune di Siena*, t. 2, d. V, r. 409.

⁶⁹ Considerazioni generali in Piccinni, "La ricerca del benessere."

zia del lavoro manuale.⁷⁰ Un forte squilibrio si nota a Perugia,⁷¹ a Siena⁷² e a Prato.⁷³ Particolare il caso di Roma, come spesso per questa città così fuori del comune, nella quale l'abbondanza degli spazi intramurali e il facile accesso ai materiali di costruzione, disponibili ovunque tra le antichità presenti nel suolo della città, consentono anche ai meno abbienti di abitare in case di proprietà.⁷⁴

La proprietà della casa segna una differenza importante tra cittadini più ricchi e più poveri, tra nuovi venuti e antichi abitanti, infine tra più poveri e più ricchi tra i nuovi venuti, anche se in genere nel tessuto urbano non sembrano esistere quartieri popolati solo da ricchi o in assoluto solo da poveri. Non meno importante sono l'ubicazione e anche i materiali e l'altezza delle case: a Perugia le tipologie edilizie minori sono diffuse soprattutto nei borghi e presso le mura – dunque negli insediamenti più nuovi – oppure si coagulano in prossimità dei monasteri e dei conventi, probabilmente per ospitare dipendenti e *familiars*;⁷⁵ il caso di Siena, ben documentato dalla *Tavola delle Possessioni* del 1318-20, mostra una convivenza delle diverse tipologie edilizie perché un po' ovunque edifici di basso valore sorgono vicino alle abitazioni dei più ricchi, anche se una concentrazione di *domuncule* si fa ancora notare in un'area della città che era cresciuta nel XII secolo.⁷⁶

6. I ceti più umili di fronte alla bellezza

Resta ancora da chiedersi se i ceti più bassi abbiano consapevolezza di quanto la bellezza ha a che fare con la loro vita. Certamente sanno che essa crea occasioni di lavoro e salario nei cantieri, per una manodopera con vari livelli di qualificazione. Abbiamo qualche sparuta testimonianza di grandi opere pubbliche avviate con l'intenzione di fronteggiare una fase di disoccupazione. A Siena già nel 1340 incontriamo il caso di un cantiere aperto in funzione anticiclica (*in subsidium dictorum pauperum*): non essendoci in quel momento un'offerta di lavoro sufficiente e mentre la carestia mette in difficoltà i *pauperes laboratores*, si delibera di dare esecuzione a un progetto antico – già delineato nel *Costituto* del 1309-10 – predisponendo un *prato* per ospitare mercati e fiere *intra le porte di Camollia*, come avveniva in *ciascuna gentile città*. Dunque, il *prato* portato a termine dai lavoratori poveri sarebbe stato fonte di *delecto et gaudio* per i cittadini e i forestieri, e infatti i concetti

⁷⁰ Pinto, Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza, 55.

⁷¹ I catasti perugini del 1285 mostrano una società ben gerarchizzata dal punto di vista immobiliare: Grohmann, *Città e territorio*, t. 1, 131.

⁷² Cherubini, "Proprietari, contadini e campagne senesi."

⁷³ Cherubini, "Ascesa e declino di Prato," 206. I dati di questa nota e delle due precedenti sono sintetizzati in Pinto, *Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza*, 55.

⁷⁴ Vedi Palermo, "La rendita e gli spazi urbani," 15.

⁷⁵ Grohmann, *Città e territorio*, t. 1, 53-4.

⁷⁶ Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena nel Trecento*, 78, 113-30.

di bellezza, onore, gaudio, diletto, guadagno, allegrezza, gentilezza rincorrono con insistenza.⁷⁷

A Siena nel 1328 il governo riferisce al consiglio generale di aver preso atto dell'andamento troppo lento dei lavori di costruzione del palazzo del comune e di aver deciso di aumentare il numero dei lavoratori impegnati nel cantiere durante i mesi primaverili ed estivi.⁷⁸ L'obiettivo dichiarato è di accelerare il completamento dell'opera compensando le giornate lavorative troppo brevi dei mesi invernali, ma naturalmente le giornate lavorative più lunghe sono più convenienti per chi paga quando i lavoratori ricevono un salario a giornata, dato che 'opera' non è tanto lo spazio temporale in cui si sviluppa l'attività del manovale quanto il lavoro ceduto in quello stesso periodo.⁷⁹ Gli statuti pisani dell'inizio del Trecento prevedono retribuzioni più basse per i maestri muratori ingaggiati dal comune, anche perché in questi casi non devono portare con sé gli attrezzi necessari, che sono forniti dai datori di lavoro pubblici ma non da quelli privati.⁸⁰

La documentazione parla anche di gruppi che subiscono emarginazione fisica perché contaminano negativamente gli abituali spazi di socialità, come i mercati, le logge, le piazze. Così predica Giordano da Pisa,⁸¹ così regolamentano tanti statuti cittadini o così più tardi le descriverà il poeta fiorentino Antonio Pucci.⁸² Spiccano motivi di decoro e ordine pubblico, di salute pubblica, di igiene pubblica, di pubblica sicurezza.⁸³ Sui palcoscenici della marginalità urbana vediamo scorrere davanti ai nostri occhi prostitute, ribaldi, scamicciati dediti al gioco,⁸⁴ lebbrosi, cuoiai e altri lavoratori di mestieri non graditi, ciechi e chi non è in grado di provvedere a sé stesso.

E allora sorge una nuova domanda, e cioè se alle diverse aree della città (vecchie e nuove, centrali o più o meno periferiche, più ricche o più povere...) si applica la stessa idea di bellezza e funzionalità. Certamente nel tessuto urbano, infatti, i luoghi che devono essere meglio tutelati sono la piazza pubblica, i suoi ingressi, la piazza del mercato, i portici, una o due strade principali, l'area intorno alla cattedrale o alla chiesa principale. All'opposto nelle aree più o meno remote vengono esiliate alcune attività e certi mestieri, con il loro fetore e i loro pericoli: le pelli da conciare, le lane da lavare e sgrassare, le acque di tintura, mordenti e rifiuti acidi da smaltire, i residui delle lavorazioni, il fuoco delle fornaci necessarie per la crescita edilizia e per cuocere le stoviglie

⁷⁷ *Il Costituto del Comune di Siena*, t. 1, d. III, r. 291. Dell'acquisto di terreno per realizzare il prato dà notizia Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, *Cronaca senese*, 306, 308. La delibera del 1340 è in ASS, Consiglio Generale, 126, cc. 17r-v, 3 febbraio 1340. Ne parlano Balestracci, Piccinni, *Siena nel Trecento*, 157 e Ascheri, "Le più antiche norme," 266.

⁷⁸ ASS, Consiglio Generale, 105, cc. 125v-127v.

⁷⁹ Pinto, *Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza*, 47 sgg.

⁸⁰ Pinto, 48.

⁸¹ Iannella, Giordano da Pisa, 169-70.

⁸² Pucci, "Le proprietà di mercato vecchio" (in Sapegno, *Poeti minori del Trecento*, 403-10).

⁸³ Riassume dati sulla presenza delle prostitute, sulla diffidenza verso i ciechi e altre figure Bocchi, *Per antiche strade*, 387 sgg.

⁸⁴ Artifoni, "I ribaldi."

o i vetri. Per tutti coloro che ci abitano o lavorano la bellezza è, tutt'al più, uno sfondo da guardare da lontano. Del resto, sappiamo ben poco.

7. *Per parlare al popolo tutto*

Il progetto politico dei governanti, per parlare al popolo tutto, persegue la bellezza anche nelle forme degli edifici e degli spazi, usata anche come un contenitore di messaggi per cercare un consenso trasversale ai vari gradini sociali, nella speranza che essa generi senso di appartenenza e pace, e che smorzi i conflitti determinati dalle disuguaglianze economiche e dalle differenze di ceto. Anche per questo sulla bellezza si investe denaro, trasformandola in un principio generale, da declinare poi nei singoli atti di governo. Negli statuti compaiono politiche per rendere le città più belle: si scrive ad esempio che *intra li studii et sollecitudini e' quali procurare si debiano per coloro, e' quali ànno ad intendere al governmento de la città, è quello massimamente che s'intenda a la belleça de la città*.⁸⁵

Nella costruzione del consenso assume un ruolo anche il passato materiale delle città perché spesso ci si dedica alla bellezza in nome dell'eredità lasciata dagli avi: a Pisa, ad esempio, vanno abbattuti i ballatoi ma solo se hanno meno di quaranta anni e non poggiano su colonne.⁸⁶ Come dire che quando la costruzione della città nuova ha appena un secolo e mezzo di vita la bellezza raggiunta viene già bloccata e trasformata in memoria. Questo non vuol dire che si tratti di una trascurabile messinscena. Siamo di fronte piuttosto alla costruzione e al consolidamento di qualcosa destinato a svolgere, da allora e anche fino ad oggi, un ruolo centrale nella vita e nell'immaginario delle popolazioni urbane. La bellezza, insomma, è stata prima creata e presto trasformata in tradizione, ma poi, una volta costruita, diviene un elemento reale essa stessa, in grado di agire, anche in forma possente, sul sentimento di appartenenza per trasformarsi in collante sociale.

Rimane aperto il problema di quanto e se quella bellezza venga percepita da tutti e per far questo bisogna mettersi in ascolto anche delle voci del dissenso,⁸⁷ strada non facile, tuttavia, e l'unica per non dare della bellezza urbana una lettura unidirezionale. Perché ad esempio una piazza pubblica bellissima può essere massimo luogo di legittimazione ma insieme anche di disconoscimento del potere.

Abbiamo già detto che gli immigrati di rango più basso finiscono tra i salariati – impegnati soprattutto, ma non solo, nei grandi cantieri delle opere pubbliche – e ne è mirabile sintesi l'immagine degli operai parigini che aspettano l'offerta di lavoro sulla piazza, malvestiti e tremanti di freddo nell'in-

⁸⁵ Esempi in Szabò, "Lo spazio pubblico," 171.

⁸⁶ Tiboni, "Il bello di Pisa."

⁸⁷ Crouzet-Pavan, "Territori contesi."

verno del 1260 quando gli alberi hanno già perso le foglie.⁸⁸ Compare, così, l'ingaggio dei lavoratori in strada. A Milano negli anni 1268-72 li incontriamo nella lavorazione dei tessuti di lana; a Padova nel 1308 *vagabondi* sono ingaggiati a giornata e per pochi giorni per far fronte a improvvise carenze di manodopera pronti ad andarsene quando l'esigenza viene meno (*operarii seu laboratores diurni ad precium et qui etiam appellari possunt vagabundi, scilicet qui paucis diebus stant in una civitate et paucis in alia*);⁸⁹ a Siena i lanaioli ingaggiano anche *persone non cognoscenti* per filare, e considerano come ladri potenziali di lane e stami che *potrebbero essere furati i lavoratori non cognosciuti che sono di diverse parti e sono non si bene disposti come si converrebbe*.⁹⁰

Qua e là compaiono norme che reprimono gli accordi che i lavoratori prendono tra di loro mentre sostano in strada o davanti ai cantieri, facendoci intuire contrasti con i datori di lavoro intorno al salario, all'offerta di lavoro, al diritto di associazione.⁹¹ A chi già sia stato ingaggiato è vietato di trattenersi nella piazza di Lodi *ad male informandum et impediendum alios laboratores*⁹² o, a Trento, di informare del salario pattuito quelli che sono ancora in attesa dell'ingaggio,⁹³ a Ferrara possono essere picchiati se interrompono il lavoro dei compagni,⁹⁴ a Siena è loro vietato di sostare la mattina in uno snodo stradale della città, per motivi di decoro.⁹⁵ E dunque non si vuole che i luoghi centrali perdano dignità se usati per assoldare una manodopera precaria, malvestita, che ha pochi o nulli diritti, ma che si muove nello spazio fisico delle piazze o delle strade principali e in quello sociale che si apre tra la marginalità e il lavoro. Perché i lavoratori che sostano in piazza o in strada, che si passano le informazioni sul salario o tentano di mettersi d'accordo non sono sempre ben disposti.⁹⁶

È nell'insoddisfazione della gente comune che possiamo cercare i segni, anche labili, di una percezione individuale delle diseguglianze nello spazio urbano. Proviamo a immaginare cosa possa rappresentare una piazza pubblica per chi aspetta un lavoro che non arriva o per chi non ha più farina per il pane: subito essa si trasforma, da luogo 'ufficiale' della gestione politica carico dei segni identitari, in punto nevralgico dove la cittadinanza converge per esprimere il proprio dissenso nei confronti dei gruppi dirigenti o dei mercanti

⁸⁸ Rutebeuf, *Oeuvres complètes*, 182, 199-201 citato in Geremek, "Le refus du travail," 382-3.

⁸⁹ Pinto, *Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza*, 21, 64; Grillo, *Milano in età comunale*, 436; Cessi, *Le corporazioni dei mercanti*, 81.

⁹⁰ Addizioni di inizio Trecento allo *Statuto dell'Arte della Lana*, 291 (cap. LVIII, lo statuto è del 1298). Si veda Balestracci, "Li lavoratori non cognosciuti."

⁹¹ Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, 54-7; vedi anche la ricca antologia in *Popular Protest*.

⁹² *Statuta vetera Luadae*, dei primi del XIII secolo, r. 505: interpretata nel senso sopra detto da Geremek, "I salari e il salariato," 378.

⁹³ Geremek, 378.

⁹⁴ *Statuta Ferrariae*, 194-5, anno 1287.

⁹⁵ ASS, Statuti, 26 (Statuto del Buongoverno), d. III, r. 365 (edizione critica in corso di stampa a cura di Valeria Capelli e Andrea Giorgi).

⁹⁶ Addizioni allo Statuto dell'arte della lana citato sopra alla nota 90.

affamatori, manifesta sotto le finestre di un bellissimo palazzo comunale, divenuto luogo ostile, e fa pressione con grida e sassaiole sui consiglieri riuniti nelle grandi sale affrescate. I piromani, i *mettefuoco*, puniti con la morte in base al *Costituto* senese del 1309-10, sono *vili persone* che appiccano il fuoco al grido di *Neuna cosa avemo che perdere potiamo*.⁹⁷ E quando la grande carestia del 1328-9 provoca la violenta sommossa della quale abbiamo parlato più sopra, gli insorti si muovono tra la piazza del bell'ospedale e la bella piazza del Campo, ma non sappiamo se alzano gli occhi a guardarle né se quella solenne bellezza frena un po' la loro ira.

Nel corso degli anni Giovanni Cherubini ha richiamato a più riprese l'attenzione sulla società urbana dell'insicurezza, della povertà e della delinquenza, ricordandoci che le nostre belle città non sono state, in definitiva, “dei mondi giusti e felici, non ostante le ambizioni, le ricchezze e le ammirevoli realizzazioni dei governanti” e invitando a spostare lo sguardo dalle immagini attraverso le quali ci parlano i ceti dominanti alle voci dei diseredati, all'azione dei ladri e dei delinquenti, a coloro che assaltano le persone nei luoghi più solitari, che organizzano furti notturni in case e botteghe, che si accordano nelle taverne, che rifuggono dalla pacata e fulgida offerta della carità pubblica e privata. Del resto, anche nel Buon Governo di Ambrogio Lorenzetti “sono le loro azioni delittuose a darci una idea approssimativa, ma significativa di come per costoro il decoro urbano [possa anche avere una] scarsa attrattiva”.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Balestracci, “La lotta contro il fuoco.”

⁹⁸ Cherubini, “La ricerca del decoro urbano,” 379.

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Gli ospedali e l'assistenza come risposta alle diseguaglianze economiche. Un osservatorio dalla Toscana medievale

di Paolo Nanni

Due dati sono sufficienti per individuare le connessioni tra ospedali e bisogni sociali all'apogeo della crescita economica medievale. Innanzitutto, è da considerare l'assunzione di responsabilità diretta da parte dei governi comunali nel campo dell'assistenza, che diveniva di fatto parte costitutiva della costruzione della *res publica*. Inoltre, la varietà di forme di protezione sociale elaborate dagli enti assistenziali documenta una azione che interessava larga parte della popolazione. La questione che in questa sede si intende affrontare è se e in che misura l'impatto sociale dell'assistenza fu in grado di rispondere alle disuguaglianze economiche. Osservando la società tardomedievale allo specchio delle risposte messe in campo, ci si può ad esempio domandare quanta (e quale) parte della popolazione era raggiunta, quali erano i bisogni considerati tali, a cosa miravano gli aiuti e come erano realizzati, quali possono essere considerati efficaci nel breve e nel lungo periodo. In questa prospettiva le disuguaglianze possono essere meglio comprese alla luce della realtà e delle percezioni della gente del tempo.

Two data points suffice to identify the links between hospitals and social needs at the height of medieval economic growth. The first is the direct responsibility assumed by municipal governments in the field of assistance, which became an integral part of the construction of the *res publica*. Furthermore, the variety of social protection mechanisms developed by welfare organizations documents an action that affected a large part of the population. The question we wish to address here is whether, and to what extent, the social impact of assistance was able to address economic inequalities. By looking at late medieval society through the lens of the responses implemented, we can ask, for example, what proportion (and what segment) of the population was reached, what needs were considered as such, what the objectives of the aid were and how they were implemented, and what can be considered effective in the short and long term. From this perspective, inequalities can be better understood in the light of the reality and perceptions of people at the time.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Toscana, città, ospedali, diseguaglianze economiche.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, Tuscany, cities, hospitals, economic inequality.

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1. Tra storiografia e storia: nuove consapevolezze della società

Accostare la storia dell'assistenza alle disuguaglianze economiche può apparire ovvio, nell'intento di verificare e valutare le capacità di risposta. Tuttavia, se queste valutazioni devono confrontarsi non solo con la povertà in generale ma con nuovi fenomeni prodotti all'interno dei meccanismi del mercato e del lavoro come le disuguaglianze economiche,¹ il tema diviene più problematico, invitando a porre attenzione a inedite fragilità che emergono nella società del tempo. Nel vario mondo della povertà e dell'assistenza,² infatti, un conto è parlare di chi povero o abbandonato dalla nascita,³ oppure rimasto in solitudine e senza risorse in età avanzata (vecchi e vedove), è destinato a rimanere povero o mendicante di aiuti. Diversa è invece la realtà di chi non ha opportunità di vedere un domani migliore dell'oggi (la 'trappola della povertà'), di chi è fallito e si è ritrovato impoverito per un periodo più o meno lungo, privato del benessere di ieri e degradato di fronte agli altri (i 'poveri vergognosi'); o ancora di uomini e donne che lavorano ma non riescono comunque a far quadrare il bilancio familiare rimanendo sull'incerto crinale dell'indigenza,⁴ messo in crisi anche solo da un parto gemellare ('poveri laboriosi' o *working poors*). In questa prospettiva rientra la distinzione tra povertà strutturale e povertà congiunturale⁵ o il tema della mobilità sociale,⁶ che sono dati storiografici acquisiti all'apogeo della crescita economica dell'Occidente.⁷

Seguendo la sollecitazione che sta alla base della riflessione di questo volume, va osservato che ciò che emerge dagli studi trova corrispondenza non solo nella 'realtà' storica, ma anche, in qualche misura, nella 'percezione' di fenomeni pervasivi della società. Nel 1345 a Firenze, al culmine di vent'anni di carestie⁸ (1328-9 e 1345-6) e calamità (l'alluvione del 1333⁹ e l'epidemia del 1340¹⁰), i miserabili del *Trionfo della morte* dell'Orcagna sono una formidabi-

¹ Nigro, *Disuguaglianza economica*.

² Pinto, *La società del bisogno*; Albini, *Una società instabile*; Ammannati, *Assistenza e solidarietà*; Garbellotti, *Per carità*.

³ Rossi, Garbellotti, Pellegrini, *Figli d'elezione*.

⁴ de La Roncière, "Poveri e povertà"; Pinto, "Ricchezza e povertà"; Balestracci, "Lavoro e povertà"; Henderson, *Pietà e carità*.

⁵ Mollat, *I poveri*; Albini, *Poveri e povertà*; Feller, Grillo, Moglia, *Donne e povertà*; Benito, Carocci, Feller, *Économies de la pauvreté*. Si veda anche il saggio di Feller in questo volume.

⁶ Carocci, Lazzarini, *Social mobility*; Tanzini, Tognetti, *La mobilità sociale*. Al tema è dedicata anche la LV Settimana Datini ("La mobilità sociale nelle società preindustriali: tendenze, cause ed effetti (secc. XIII-XVIII)", Prato, 12-6 maggio 2024: <https://www.istitutodatini.it/temi/htm/temi55.htm>).

⁷ Franceschi, "La crescita economica."

⁸ Pinto, "Firenze e la carestia"; Pinto, "Le città italiane."

⁹ Salvestrini, *Libera città*; Schenk, "L'alluvione del 1333."

¹⁰ "Che incontante cominciò grande mortalità [fine marzo 1340], che quale si ponea malato, quasi nullo ne scampava; e morinne più che il sesto di cittadini pure de' migliori e più cari, maschi e femmine, che non rimase famiglia ch'alcuno non ne morisse, e dove due o ttre e più; e durò quella pestilenza infino al verno vegnente. E più di XVm corpi tra maschi e femmine e fanciulli se ne seppellirono pure nella città, onde la città era tutta piena di pianto e di dolore, e non si intendea apena ad altro, che a sopellire morti": Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 226 (XII, 114).

le fotografia delle infermità che si osservano negli sguardi assenti dei ciechi e nelle grucce degli zoppi. Ma anche le loro parole, che quasi escono dai corpi, attirano l'attenzione, poiché la causa della disperazione è la perdita della prosperità, che ha anche una valenza economica e sociale: *da che prosperitate ci ha lasciati, oh Morte, medicina d'ogni pena, de' vienci a dare omai l'ultima cena*. Sono i miserabili dell'Orcagna che parlano o è la coscienza di quanti dimoravano o entravano in Santa Croce a dare loro voce?

Partendo da queste prime note, una valutazione delle possibili risposte alle diseguaglianze economiche da parte degli enti assistenziali deve calibrare la prospettiva di analisi. Gli enti assistenziali sono chiamati in causa solo per verificare le loro capacità di rispondere a una più vasta platea di poveri generata da nuovi fenomeni economici e sociali? Si tratta insomma solo di misurare gli investimenti in assistenza a fronte degli andamenti demografici o della articolazione sociale per valutarne l'efficacia di fronte a una crescita dei bisogni e dei bisognosi?

Il tema può certamente essere trattato in questa chiave, e in certo modo è stato fatto,¹¹ sebbene con la difficoltà di reperire dati seriali ed analitici per quest'epoca. Ritengo però che altre domande possono essere prese in considerazione alla luce della realtà storica della povertà e dell'assistenza. All'apogeo della crescita medievale, ad esempio, esiste una consapevolezza della emergenza sociale di questi nuovi poveri? E se sì la storia dell'assistenza ha mostrato un salto qualitativo, non solo quantitativo, tale da indurre ad articolare anche una più precisa periodizzazione tra XIII e XIV secolo? La storia dell'assistenza, che va sotto il nome di carità, è solo una risposta contingente o interpreta una progettualità che, pur nei condizionamenti del tempo, rivolgeva lo sguardo al futuro? Parlare di progetti o di avvenire non è facile in una analisi storica di epoche lontane e diverse dalla nostra. Tuttavia, a sostegno di queste possibili prospettive, posso ricordare una riflessione sulla ricerca del benessere individuale e sociale, che è stata proposta alla prova della storia delle città italiane del tardo medioevo proprio al fine di esaminare le ambivalenze di una società in trasformazione.¹²

Il mio contributo va in questa direzione e risente delle novità del progetto di ricerca intitolato *Alle origini del welfare*¹³ in una prospettiva europea, dove il termine *welfare* non è stato adottato come espediente evocativo per dare lustro di attualità al mondo medievale. Non si è trattato cioè di usare un'altra parola per dire le stesse cose, ma di proporre nuove chiavi interpretative per leggere e legare in un discorso storico coerente ciò che spesso è stato trattato in modo disgiunto, ovvero da una parte le scelte religiose dall'altra l'economia e le soluzioni istituzionali, operate anche attraverso razionalizzazioni e accorpamenti di enti tra XIV e XV secolo.

¹¹ van Bavel, Rijpma, "How important."

¹² Piccinni, "La ricerca del benessere."

¹³ Piccinni, *Alle origini del Welfare*.

Partirò pertanto da alcune spie significative che documentano una nuova consapevolezza della povertà che riguarda l'intero corpo sociale, di fronte alla quale possiamo comprendere meglio anche le risposte messe in campo con un "colpo di genio"¹⁴ della società del tempo. Se è vero che le fonti ospedaliere o memorie dell'assistenza¹⁵ sono il principale specchio della società medievale, grazie alle quali possiamo conoscere una folla altrimenti senza nome nell'oscurità del tempo, dobbiamo aggiungere che ospedali e enti assistenziali riflettono con chiarezza una società in mutamento, nonostante la difficoltà "a prendere coscienza dell'esistenza di forme di indigenza che non fossero legate all'immagine tradizionale del povero" e "ad accettare una povertà che si sviluppava malgrado il lavoro e all'interno della categoria degli occupati".¹⁶

2. Qualcosa di antico, anzi di nuovo: i poveri come parte del corpo sociale

All'apogeo della crescita esistono chiari segnali di nuove forme di povertà, "un'indigenza lavoratrice o, più precisamente, una indigenza prodotta da e nel mondo del lavoro"¹⁷ che non sfuggiva alla gente del tempo. Se ne trova chiara eco negli statuti delle corporazioni che prevedevano un mutuo soccorso tra i membri dell'arte,¹⁸ o nelle confraternite che prendevano cura dei *pauperes verecundi*, termine che comincia a comparire dalla metà del XIII secolo in aree economicamente vivaci come il *Consortium pauperum verecundorum* di Modena, la confraternita della Beata Vergine di Arezzo o in Lombardia. Non è facile stabilire quale fosse la percentuale di questa povertà laboriosa o degli impoveriti nelle stime quantitative dei poveri che possiamo reperire dalle cronache o dalla documentazione pubblica. Giovanni Villani, sempre molto attento ai numeri della sua Firenze, ci offre tuttavia qualche indicazione parlando dei poveri che nel settembre del 1330 si recarono a ricevere l'elemosina grazie a un lascito di un cittadino fiorentino: 17.000 erano i poveri *tra maschi e femmine piccioli e grandi*, ai quali si aggiungevano i *poveri vergognosi e quegli degli spedali e pregioni e religiosi mendicanti* stimati in più di 4.000.¹⁹ L'iniziativa non fu certo risoltrice dei problemi della povertà, dal momento che si trattava di piccole cifre (6 denari al primo gruppo e 12 al secondo), ma lascia intravedere che un quinto della popolazione fiorentina era riconosciuta in stato di bisogno e i poveri vergognosi costituivano una componente non secondaria sul totale di coloro che beneficiarono di questa straordinaria elemosina.

¹⁴ Piccinni, "Documenti per una storia."

¹⁵ Marino, Colesanti, *Memorie dell'assistenza*; Avallone, Colesanti, Marino, *Alle origini dell'assistenza*; Moriani, "Questo presente libro."

¹⁶ Franceschi, "Forme di assistenza," 352; Farmer, *Surviving poverty*. Si veda anche il saggio di Feller in questo volume.

¹⁷ Piccinni, "All'apogeo," 401.

¹⁸ Franceschi, "La pietà nelle associazioni."

¹⁹ Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, II, 725 (XI, 163).

Nonostante le difficoltà a quantificare il fenomeno non sfugge il fatto che i poveri, nel momento in cui erano denotati nelle diverse tipologie, erano riconosciuti come parte del corpo sociale. E questo riconoscimento è ulteriormente confermato dal fatto che i poveri non erano estranei alle argomentazioni politiche e alla valutazione dei governi. Nella discordia dei primi del Trecento tra i *grandi* e il *popolo grasso*, Dino Compagni riporta l'intervento di Corso Donati che, *sotto colore di giustizia e di pietà*, alla ricerca del consenso del popolo minuto, si era fatto difensore dei *poveri uomini* [...] *tribolati e spogliati di loro sustanzie con le imposte* per la guerra.²⁰ Vera o falsa che sia l'allusione all'ipocrisia, resta il fatto che i poveri erano argomento di rilevanza politica. Si può inoltre aggiungere che *Specchio umano* non è il titolo di un'opera dotta, ma il libro di un biadaio scritto con *volgare materno*, dove sono riportati non solo i prezzi giornalieri del grano e delle altre biade dal 1320 al 1335²¹ ma anche le grida di piazza della gente e le azioni intraprese dalla città di Firenze per fronteggiare la grande carestia del 1328-9. Corredato di figure, poiché *chi sa cognoscere per sé con figura non sa forse leggere*, l'intento di Domenico Lenzi era quello di giudicare l'operato dei governi poiché le incontrollate speculazioni sul prezzo del grano che affamavano la città erano riflesso (*specchio*) e perciò giudizio sul loro operato, così come lo erano le politiche annonarie capaci di soccorrere i poveri, parte dell'*ordinatissima charità* messa in opera da Firenze. Assicurare l'accesso generalizzato ai beni alimentari²² era dunque parte dei compiti di governo, a cui faceva eco ancora la cronaca del Villani, che per dare esempio ai futuri cittadini di Firenze chiariva sia i *rimedi* adottati (acquistare grano e vendere a prezzi calmierati pani di grano misto) sia l'*argomento* ovvero l'efficacia del messaggio politico, perché così anche i salariati che guadagnavano pochi denari al giorno potevano portare qualcosa a casa, scongiurando così *romore e rubellazioni*.²³

Tanto i 'poveri' quanto i 'deboli' divengono insomma parole chiave nei discorsi politici del tempo. Nella sala del Consiglio di Siena, a difesa dei 'deboli' contro i 'potenti' che li gravavano *o con vergogne o danni*, stava il chiaro monito della Maestà di Simone Martini: *Ma se i potenti a' debil' fien molesti, / gravando loro o con vergogne o danni, / le vostre orazion non son per questi / né per qualunque la mia terra inganni*. Come è stato osservato da Gabriella Piccinni, la protezione dei deboli da parte del comune e l'assistenza ai poveri da parte dell'ospedale si univano in "una visione globale della società, in quanto, nel momento stesso in cui ne includevano le debolezze, individuavano

²⁰ E cominciò [Corso Donati] a seminare discordie, e sotto colore di giustizia e di pietà dicea in questo modo: *I poveri uomini sono tribolati e spogliati di loro sustanzie con le imposte e con le libbre, e alcuni se ne empiono le borse. Veggasi dove sì gran somma di moneta è ita, però che non se ne può esser tanta consumata nella guerra*: Compagni, *Cronica*, 80 (II, 34).

²¹ Pinto, *Il libro del Biadaio*.

²² Pinto, "Approvvigionamento e mercato." Si vedano anche i saggi di Mucciarelli, Palermo e Wilkin in questo volume.

²³ Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, II, 670-3 (XI, 119); Nanni, "Facing the Crisis."

l'intera collettività".²⁴ Del resto tra le cause di tiranno manifesto, cioè quelli senza possibili eccezioni, lo stesso Bartolo da Sassoferrato inseriva anche *de-pauperare subditos et eos affligere in personis et rebus*.²⁵ Ma al tempo stesso l'azione pubblica si coniugava con iniziative individuali che avevano rilevanza sociale, attraverso la circolazione del dono che faceva ritornare alla società il frutto delle attività economiche e mercantili.²⁶ Il binomio "carità e profitto" esprimeva di fatto "due facce di una stessa realtà economico-politica", come ha sintetizzato Giacomo Todeschini.²⁷

Credo che questi esempi siano sufficienti a segnalare la consapevolezza di una nuova emergenza che interessava la società del tempo, non foss'altro perché quei poveri o impoveriti erano anche potenziale risorsa di manodopera delle reti produttive delle città.²⁸

3. Anche l'assistenza si rinnova: le imprese pubbliche della carità

Di fronte a vecchie e nuove forme di disagio sociale la società del tempo non poteva che rivolgersi agli strumenti che già possedeva,²⁹ ovvero quei numerosi enti che da tempo svolgevano compiti assistenziali. Potrei ripetere con Giovanni Cherubini che in storia è più facile fare cose nuove che elaborare nuove idee, anche se quelle innovazioni lasciano intravedere concezioni che poi si rendono esplicite.³⁰ Credo che questa sia la chiave per leggere gli interventi con cui i governi comunali, a partire dalla metà del XIII secolo, assunsero compiti sempre maggiori nei confronti di ospedali, confraternite ed enti elemosinieri sottraendoli al controllo ecclesiastico.³¹ Ma questa azione non ebbe solo i caratteri di un rinnovamento istituzionale o gestionale, ma anche di un ripensamento dei doveri dei governi verso la società.³²

Come ha osservato Michele Pellegrini, negli anni Novanta del XIII secolo tre eventi sanciscono quanto già dalla metà del secolo stava avvenendo nell'Italia comunale dei governi di popolo secondo diverse forme di intervento pubblico.³³ Si tratta nello specifico degli interventi di Firenze verso il lebbrosario di Sant'Eusebio o dell'ospedale di San Gallo posto *sub protectione et defensione Communis Florentiae* attraverso l'arte di Por Santa Maria (1293-4); della *Domus Misericordie* di Perugia (1296) e degli interventi di Siena verso

²⁴ Piccinni, "Introduzione. I volti dell'iniziativa assistenziale."

²⁵ Quaglioni, *Politica e diritto*.

²⁶ Arnoux, "Apogeo, crisi e 'modernizzazione'; Arnoux, "Conclusioni."

²⁷ Todeschini, "Credibilità, fiducia, ricchezza," 18; Todeschini, *I mercanti e il tempio*.

²⁸ Arnoux, *Un monde sans ressources*, 207-70.

²⁹ Albini, *Città e ospedali*; Greco, Sandri, *Ospedali e città*; Sabaté, *L'assistència a l'etad mitjana*; Villanueva, Conejo, Villagrasa-Elías, *Redes hospitalarias*.

³⁰ Cherubini, *Le città italiane*.

³¹ Albini, *Carità e governo*; Benvenuti, "La municipalizzazione."

³² Piccinni, "I grandi ospedali urbani."

³³ Pellegrini, "Governi di popolo."

la *Domus Misericordie* e gli ospedali di S. Niccolò e S. Croce (1296). Gli esempi naturalmente potrebbero proseguire, dalle grandi città come Firenze, Siena e Pisa,³⁴ per rimanere in Toscana, fino ai centri minori.³⁵ Ogni città può vantare le proprie peculiarità, che comprendono anche nuove fondazioni dai caratteri originali, come nel caso della Fraternita dei Laici di Arezzo,³⁶ che raccoglieva al suo interno tutta la cittadinanza aretina.

In sintesi, assistenza e assistiti entrano a pieno nello spazio politico da governare da parte dei regimi di popolo. E non è inoltre forzatura ritenere che la circolazione di un ceto mercantile nei ruoli ospedalieri portò competenze, intraprendenza e attitudini gestionali³⁷ che si riversarono anche nella tenuta dell'amministrazione e della contabilità,³⁸ da contestualizzare nell'ambito di aziende pubbliche e non private, che dovevano assolvere alle principali funzioni di rendicontare entrate e uscite, deliberazioni congrue con le finalità dell'ente tali da essere sottoposte al controllo del governo.

Questo intervento pubblico non ebbe solo il risultato di avvalorare ulteriormente quegli enti come affidabili destinatari di donazioni e lasciti testamentari, ma ne influenzò naturalmente la *governance*, attraverso le cariche periodiche (rettori e camerlenghi), le forme di controllo (i ragionieri revisori), e anche il *modus operandi* che da specifiche attività come le distribuzioni di pane, il ricovero degli infermi o l'accoglienza degli orfani e più in generale dell'infanzia abbandonata anche sotto forma di adozioni,³⁹ si articolava in una varietà di interventi modulati sui bisogni individuali, dai poveri pubblici ai poveri vergognosi. Nel caso dei più grandi enti, come il Santa Maria della Scala, l'ospedale divenne anche anello strategico del mercato del denaro, aprendo all'inizio del Trecento un banco che svolgeva funzioni di antesignana cassa di risparmio oltre a finanziare il debito pubblico della città.⁴⁰ Ma la cosa interessante è la varietà di persone che rintracciamo allo specchio della documentazione, dove si trovano "esponenti di tutti i livelli sociali e di reddito della città", dimostrando inoltre che "esisteva un risparmio, piccolo o grande, da proteggere e tutelare".⁴¹

³⁴ Pinto, "L'ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova;" Pellegrini, *La comunità ospedaliera*; Piccinni, "Il contesto politico-sociale;" Ronzani, "Nascita e affermazione."

³⁵ Luongo, "Gli ospedali civici."

³⁶ Moriani, "Assistenza e beneficenza."

³⁷ Gazzini, Olivieri, *L'ospedale, il denaro*; Gazzini, "La fraternita come luogo di economia;" Bianchi, "L'economia delle confraternite."

³⁸ Palermo, "Gestione economica e contabilità;" Tognetti, "Imprese ospedaliere;" Tognetti, "E terassi per bilancio."

³⁹ Rossi, Garbellotti, "L'adozione e l'affido."

⁴⁰ Piccinni, *Il banco dell'ospedale*. Si tratta di un caso particolare, ma forme di credito solidale ricorrono in molti casi prima dei Monti di Pietà: Avallone, *Prestare ai poveri*; Muzzarelli, *Il denaro e la salvezza*; Avallone, Salvemini, "Al servizio dello Stato."

⁴¹ Piccinni, *Il banco dell'ospedale*, 163, 165-95: i dati pubblicati, estratti dal *Libro del debito nuovo* (anni 1347-77) comprendono 520 depositanti, tra persone fisiche, comprese molte donne, ed enti.

La scintilla che si accende tra emergenza dei bisogni, fragilità da proteggere e compiti dei governanti, si tradusse insomma non solo in un ampliamento di quanto già facevano in termini di assistenza e ruolo economico, ovvero redistribuzione della ricchezza che prodotta dal mercato ritornava a beneficio della società, ma assunse più precisamente l'inedita forma di imprese pubbliche della carità. Ospedali e enti assistenziali erano sì collettori di crescenti donazioni che servivano a finanziare le diverse tipologie d'aiuto,⁴² ma grazie ai crescenti patrimoni fondiari accumulati⁴³ si rinnovarono come operatori del mercato con caratteri di impresa, perché investivano risorse per mantenere o incrementare le disponibilità da destinare alla loro "ragione sociale",⁴⁴ ovvero i poveri.

Se queste rinnovate direttrici tramano obiettivamente la storia dell'assistenza, si deve però anche aggiungere che l'azione intrapresa verso le opere assistenziali divenne anche elaborazione di significati e messaggi di carattere civile e politico. In questo scorcio di medioevo l'operare della carità⁴⁵ è divenuto anche elaborazione di nuove idee, progettualità e valori condivisi. Come è stato puntualizzato da Gabriella Piccinni, "il mondo che sta dentro la parola *caritas* non è univoco, si tratta anche di una virtù di natura politica, e la sua stessa declinazione religiosa implica una dimensione laica in quanto si manifesta in opere modellate sull'emergenza dei bisogni" e "attraverso istituti che utilizzano il 'dono' trasformandolo in servizi, una parte del sentire etico dei cittadini riceve un senso e una direzione sociale, all'interno del sostegno e dell'azione del 'pubblico'".⁴⁶

Inoltre, la monumentalità degli edifici⁴⁷ e il finanziamento di opere d'arte che contribuivano al decoro urbano, resero la misericordia e la carità soggetti della comunicazione politica. La "politica dell'evidenza" è il termine utilizzato per leggere particolari iconografie che compaiono in spazi aperti al pubblico, come la misericordia della Loggia del Bigallo che si fa concetto e opera attraverso la folla che in suo nome abbraccia la città.⁴⁸

4. *Uno scarto interpretativo: un welfare prima del welfare state*

Se forme di governo, funzione sociale, fisionomia d'impresa e comunicazione politica sono elementi chiave che emergono dalla storia di questo nuovo slancio collettivo, è chiaro che le categorie interpretative devono ridefinirsi. Non si tratta cioè solo di 'opere di bene', ma, come ha osservato Luciano Paler-

⁴² Albini, "Finanziare i luoghi pii;" Albini, "Gli ospedali."

⁴³ Pinto, "Formazione e gestione."

⁴⁴ Piccinni, *Il banco dell'ospedale*, 27.

⁴⁵ Nanni, "L'operare economico della *caritas*."

⁴⁶ Piccinni, "Introduzione. I volti dell'assistenza," 26.

⁴⁷ Gabbriellini, "Modelli di architettura."

⁴⁸ Krüger, *La politica dell'evidenza*.

mo, “qui si discute d'altro”, poiché gli enti assistenziali, imprese pubbliche della carità, svolgevano di fatto anche “funzioni di supplenza della domanda” di assistenza e servizi, “che per definizione caratterizza sempre una organizzazione di tipo più o meno pubblico posta dalle autorità a sostegno dei consumi essenziali dei nullatenenti”.⁴⁹ Anche dal punto di vista dell'analisi economica, insomma, l'uso del termine *welfare* non è estraneo a quegli enti medievali che intercettavano nuove realtà sociali nel contesto della fase espansiva dell'economia occidentale e delle disuguaglianze.

Fatte queste precisazioni, si ripropongono le domande iniziali circa gli esiti e i risultati nel breve e lungo periodo. A proposito dei poveri laboriosi, ovvero il mondo degli artigiani e dei salariati, Franco Franceschi ha rilevato le varie forme di aspirazioni e di mobilità sociale attesa e disattesa.⁵⁰ E a proposito della mutua solidarietà all'interno del mondo delle corporazioni ha anche messo in evidenza che la protezione sociale prevista dagli statuti delle arti non può considerarsi in declino tra XIII-XIV secolo, a fronte di nuovi ospedali creati dalle arti o affidati alle arti. Tuttavia, una valutazione degli esiti prodotti dall'assistenza, ovvero la valutazione della risposta alle disuguaglianze sociali, rimane carente di informazioni, specialmente riguardo al mondo della povertà laboriosa, poiché le fonti non ci permettono una chiara fotografia di tutti coloro che erano assistiti dagli ospedali ed enti elemosinieri, specialmente a riguardo di categorie professionali o estrazione sociale. Senza contare che è inevitabile supporre che non tutti i nomi di coloro che si recavano per le distribuzioni di pane fossero registrati negli elenchi conservati nei pur ricchissimi archivi assistenziali, lasciando le nostre ricerche sulla soglia dell'indecifrabile orizzonte della marginalità.

Una prima conclusione dovrebbe innanzitutto riconoscere che le forme dell'assistenza medievale non cancellarono le cause delle disuguaglianze e le loro conseguenze, ma “contribuivano, almeno in parte, al mantenimento di un minimo di equilibrio sociale urbano”.⁵¹ Tuttavia, considerando l'articolato sistema delle imprese pubbliche della carità, anche la valutazione del loro impatto sociale richiede di calibrare gli strumenti di analisi.

5. Valutare l'impatto sociale: la catena del valore della carità

Facendo tesoro di ricerche condotte sulla notevole documentazione degli enti assistenziali pratesi negli anni del catasto fiorentino del 1427,⁵² vorrei segnalare alcune riflessioni sulle dimensioni che consentono di vagliare l'impatto sociale e la catena del valore delle opere di carità. Siamo oltre i limiti cronologici considerati in questo volume, tuttavia la straordinaria possibilità di

⁴⁹ Palermo, “Il patrimonio e il mercato,” 258.

⁵⁰ Franceschi, “Forme di assistenza.”

⁵¹ Palermo, “Il patrimonio e il mercato,” 275.

⁵² Luongo, Nanni, *Prato, i Pratesi e gli enti assistenziali*.

far interagire le ricchissime fonti assistenziali dei due ospedali (Misericordia e Dolce) e dei due ceppi (il Vecchio di Monte Pugliese e il nuovo di Francesco Datini) con la monumentale “cronica domestica”, come la definiva Elio Conti,⁵³ del Catasto del 1427, ha permesso di intercettare con maggior dettaglio persone e famiglie pratesi legate in vario modo a quegli enti, evidenziando aspetti quantitativi e qualitativi.

Rimandando a quanto trattato in altra sede⁵⁴ mi limito ad alcune considerazioni che, come nel caso del *welfare*, intendono allargare le griglie interpretative per la valutazione dell'impatto sociale ed economico dell'assistenza. Del resto, anche oggi per le imprese del ‘terzo settore’ si analizzano varie dimensioni, dalle risorse impiegate (capitali e lavoro) alle attività, dagli esiti monitorati (destinatari raggiunti) ai risultati nel breve e medio termine, fino all'avvio di processi di lungo periodo che misurano l'impatto e che comprendono anche le forme di *governance* e la sostenibilità economica.

Partendo dalle risorse economiche degli enti assistenziali, esse comprendevano naturalmente il patrimonio (case e proprietà fondiaria) costituito grazie alle donazioni, ma anche i proventi derivanti dalla gestione produttiva delle terre. Se tali misure possono essere quantificate (attraverso inventari e libri di entrata e uscita) non si deve trascurare il lavoro che gli ospedali mettevano in moto per la conduzione aziendale (contratti mezzadrili e affitti), per le opere di manutenzione edilizia o per la cura diretta di vigne e orti, oltre naturalmente all'approvvigionamento di prodotti di consumo ospedaliero (tessitori e tessitrici) e di servizi come le balie e il personale delle infermerie. La ‘macchina’ assistenziale, insomma, metteva in moto una catena di lavoro che era già in sé opportunità di integrazione dei redditi familiari di chi era impiegato e che poteva coinvolgere i capifamiglia (lavoratori dei campi o a opera negli orti e vigne o per le manutenzioni degli edifici) e le donne (tessitrici e filatrici, balie).

Le attività assistenziali correvano dunque su un duplice binario e comprendevano sia la gestione economica già ricordata, sia l'assistenza che era modulata sui bisogni: dai ricoveri negli ospedali alle cure domiciliari, dalle distribuzioni di pane (o farina) alle elemosine, fino all'accoglienza di vedove, anziani, orfani e orfane che tuttavia potevano contribuire al funzionamento degli enti. È naturale che una prima misurazione degli esiti immediati può essere valutata dalla quantità di letti e ricoveri, dal numero degli assistiti, dalle quantità di erogazioni in natura e in elemosine, o dalle tipologie di aiuto che comprendevano anche interventi *ad personam*.

Tuttavia, questo *modus operandi* che si articolava in interventi non solo generalizzati ma anche calibrati su bisogni individuali apre ad una prima considerazione circa la penetrazione sociale, poiché gli enti mentre rispondevano

⁵³ Conti, *I catasti agrari*, 37.

⁵⁴ Nanni, “L'operare economico della *caritas*,” Luongo, Nanni, *Prato, i Pratesi e gli enti assistenziali*, 99-138.

a un bisogno personale legittimavano anche l'appartenenza al corpo sociale dei poveri assistiti nel momento in cui ne riconoscevano il bisogno. Del resto, anche i loro nomi li conosciamo solo grazie alle fonti ospedaliere. Inoltre, considerando l'insieme di individui che finora abbiamo pur rapidamente passato in rassegna – chi governava e gestiva, chi lavorava, chi riceveva aiuto – si pone una domanda a cui non sempre è possibile dare una risposta certa, ovvero quanti e chi erano coloro che avevano rapporto con gli enti assistenziali.

Il caso delle ricerche sugli enti pratesi, per soli tre anni a cavallo del catasto del 1427, ha consentito di stimare con buon grado di approssimazione che oltre la metà dei nuclei familiari della terra e distretto di Prato avevano rapporto con gli ospedali e i ceppi, attraverso uno o più membri della stessa famiglia. Il dato conferma le stime di Paola Pinelli per il XIV secolo,⁵⁵ anche se il maggior dettaglio del Catasto del 1427 rispetto ai precedenti estimi consente di entrare più da vicino nella realtà dei nuclei familiari, consentendo di evidenziare relazioni parentali, età e tracce delle condizioni economiche e sociali (a volte piccoli o piccolissimi proprietari) che, come noto, non sempre sono evidenziabili dai ruoli fiscali. Mi basterà ricordare che coloro che risultavano fiscalmente come 'miserabili' potevano trovarsi in condizioni molto diverse, dove l'età, la composizione del nucleo familiare e la capacità o non capacità di lavorare determinavano sensibili differenze nella distinzione tra povertà strutturale e congiunturale che qui ci interessa in modo particolare.

Se dunque si intende valutare i risultati conseguiti, occorre considerare che gli enti assistenziali interagivano con gran parte della popolazione e rappresentavano di fatto uno spazio relazionale che metteva a contatto mondi e categorie sociali molto diversi tra loro. Estremizzando un po' la riflessione, si può sostenere che se la ragione sociale degli enti assistenziali erano i poveri, se la loro azione corrispondeva a quella di imprese pubbliche di carattere sociale, e se la loro finalità non si esauriva solo nell'assistenza e nelle elemosine ma in una più ampia difesa del corpo sociale, si deve ammettere che la valutazione dell'impatto economico e sociale deve allargare la griglia interpretativa esaminando l'insieme dei processi attivati lungo tutta la catena di azione della carità, quanto a offerta di lavoro, intervento nel mercato dei prodotti alimentari e rete di relazioni sociali.

Un'ulteriore considerazione credo infine possa essere portata all'attenzione. Come già accennato, la documentazione degli enti assistenziali rappresenta una fonte storica di straordinaria portata, non solo per la conservazione di patrimoni archivistici enormi e di lunga durata, ma anche perché rappresentano le uniche fonti che ci permettono di rintracciare nomi e individui altrimenti sconosciuti e di entrare in territori non facili da studiare come l'"economia dei poveri". Ho usato il virgolettato perché *L'economia dei poveri* è il titolo di un volume di due premi Nobel per l'economia (2019), Banerjee e Duflo, che hanno criticato l'analisi economica della povertà spesso ridotta a un'"analisi

⁵⁵ Pinelli, "Demo a' poveri"; Raveggi, "Le condizioni di vita."

economica povera”,⁵⁶ proponendo invece di considerare i poveri come “fonte di conoscenze” o “persone a cui chiedere cosa pensino o cosa desiderino”, poiché anche chi ha poche disponibilità ha una sua razionalità economica. Credo che queste osservazioni, valide per il mondo attuale, costituiscano un’interessante provocazione anche per lo studio della storia. Gli enti assistenziali non hanno certo potuto eliminare la povertà, e neppure era questa la loro finalità, ma ne hanno alleviato gli effetti attraverso forme e mezzi senza dubbio originali. La prospettiva potrebbe così cambiare, riflettendo in che misura i poveri siano stati riconosciuti nella loro individualità e abbiano diritto alla loro parte nella storia grazie all’opera di quei ‘luoghi’ che stanno all’origine delle forme della solidarietà e del *welfare*. È un po’ la sensibilità con cui Giuseppina De Sandre aveva utilizzato una vertenza del lebbrosario veronese di San Giacomo alla Tomba, dove la relazione tra sani e malati, e seppure in piccola parte le loro voci, oltrepassano la soglia della sola organizzazione interna di un luogo di pena: “Per la conoscenza dello storico il mondo di un lebbrosario si fa umanamente più ricco, e perciò più aperto a una lettura in divenire”.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Banerjee, Duflo, *L’economia dei poveri*, 7.

⁵⁷ De Sandre Gasparini, *Fra i lebbrosi*, 90.

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