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After One Disaster Comes Another? Extraordinary Events and Their Lessons in the *Croniche di Lucca*

Summary: In the *Croniche di Lucca*, which covers the period of Lucca's history from 1168 to 1424, we read about many natural disasters. We can read in detail about the lean years of 1181, 1284, 1330, 1348–1350, and 1400, and the plagues that followed, as well as the great windstorm of 1398. According to the descriptions, epidemics were almost always followed by wars or urban riots. The author of the historical work, Giovanni Sercambi (1348–1424), was not only a writer but also an active politician. He wrote down a significant part of the events he witnessed with the aim of teaching. He tried to formulate correlations both in the case of party fights and riots affecting the life of the city, as well as in the case of the aforementioned disasters. He stated that bad things are usually followed by more bad things.

He usually attached social or moral consequences to the individual events, which are outstanding sources of the history of the mentality of that period. He stated that the moral implications of the disunity experienced in urban politics are famine and epidemics, which in turn can lead to riots and uprisings. The question is, what were the additional consequences of the extraordinary events for the inhabitants of the city at the time? In my presentation, I will examine the relevant entries of the chronicle, analyse the social and moral lessons written down by Sercambi, compare the chapters of the Lucca source with the relevant notes of other contemporary Tuscan historical works, and draw conclusions about the unique features.

Keywords: *Croniche di Lucca*, Italy, Sercambi, epidemics, internal fights, riots, violent events, disasters



Giovanni Sercambi (1348–1424), author of the *Croniche di Lucca*, recorded several extraordinary events or catastrophes, the examination of which leads to important historical lessons. He may have started writing the chronicle, which consists of two books, in the early 1390s. The work of more than a thousand pages has great historical value, as it is the only narrative source we have that presents the history of the contemporary city of Lucca.¹ Other works written by Sercambi are also known. He probably wrote the *Nota ai Guinigi* between 1390 and 1392, which is a short advisory lesson for the younger members of the Guinigi family on the smooth administration of the city.² We should also mention the collection of short stories, which is entitled *Novelle*, which contains more than one hundred and fifty short stories on various topics.³

To examine our primary source, it is also worth considering the Sercambi-era Lucca geopolitical situation. The city allied itself first with Florence at the beginning of the 14th century. Then, under the leadership of Castruccio Castracani, it became a regional power for a short time. Troops of Lucca were able to approach the city of lilies several times; however, after the fall of the ruler, a power vacuum was created. After a turbulent period, the city was acquired by John of Bohemia and then by the Rossi family of Parma (1331–1335), followed by Mastino della Scala.⁴ In the next period, neighbouring Pisa moved in. Lucca in 1368 — with external help — was able to regain its independence, but from then on the city was in a difficult political situation. Due to its location, Lucca became a focal point for geographical competition between its expansive neighbours (Florence and Pisa). The area of Lucca was crucial, as the most significant coastal trade route ran through it in a north-south direction (following the Roman Via Aurelia and Francigena), while in the north-east direction it was possible to reach the fertile Romagna from Tuscany through the mountainous areas to ensure trade.⁵

Giovanni Sercambi was a witness to intrigues, and the chronicler himself was an active politician. Almost every year from his youth until his death, he served as an official in Lucca.⁶ His influential supporters were members of the Guinigi family, who governed the city informally until 1400, when Paolo Guinigi was able to secure his election by the city councils as captain (*capitano*) and then as formal ruler (*Signore*).⁷ The family influence thus took shape in the last decades of Sercambi into an actual monopoly. After Paolo came to power, the chronicler became a member of

1 Osheim D.J. 2007, 145–149.

2 *Nota ai Guinigi*, 397–407.

3 Meek C. 1991, 37–47.

4 Green L. 1995, 43–77.

5 Bratchel M.E. 2008, xviii; Goldthwaite R.A. 2009, 13.

6 Tori G. 1991, 109; Brogi M. 1991, 148.

7 Meek C. 1987, 333–343.

the small group who gave advice directly to the Signore.⁸ In addition to political events, Sercambi also documented storms, earthquakes, and — last but not least — epidemics. Below, I will first briefly present the types of natural disasters that appear in the chronicle and then describe the political consequences of the plague epidemics between 1363 and 1399.

Famines, Starvations, and the Windstorm

The author of the *Croniche di Lucca* wrote that in 1181 the great famine (*grande fame*) was followed by death (*grande moria*), i.e., it was probably followed by some kind of epidemic.⁹ Sercambi reports that in 1243 there was no rain for five months, which caused a huge crop shortage. In 1346, before the great plague, the grain yield was so poor that, according to the Lucca chronicler, the townspeople ate wild flowers.¹⁰ In some cases, heavy rain caused the famine; it rained continuously in 1410, which the author attributed to God's punishment.¹¹ Nine years later, however, the chronicler noted that the people of Lucca could expect a bountiful harvest due to the rain, while the Florentines and Pisans could expect destruction due to the flooding of the Arno.¹² Interestingly, the warfare of the time was also able to utilise the latter phenomenon: in 1405, the people of Pisa launched an attack on San Miniato because the flood made it possible.¹³ We can read about other natural calamities: in 1244, many buildings in Lucca collapsed when an earthquake struck the city three times in one night.¹⁴

It is well known that starvation was also used during sieges. Although it does not belong to the scope of natural disasters, it is worth mentioning briefly, since it points to the vulnerability of medieval cities. In 1302 the troops from Lucca took the fortress of Seravalle by employing this as a tactic,¹⁵ and in 1306, together with the Florentines, they blockaded the city of Pistoia, which sympathised with the White Guelphs, and forced it to surrender after a month.¹⁶ Dino Compagni, the Florentine author active around 1300, also reports on this. According to him, the besieged first ate the dogs and cats; then, in the last days, the possibility of cannibalism also arose.¹⁷ Fortunately, according to the descriptions, this did not happen because the Florentines finally entered

8 Meek C. 1987, 281.

9 Sercambi G. 1892, I/16.

10 Sercambi G. 1892, I/129.

11 Sercambi G. 1892, II/205.

12 Sercambi G. 1892, II/286.

13 Sercambi G. 1892, II/104.

14 Sercambi G. 1892, I/61.

15 Sercambi G. 1892, I/106.

16 Sercambi G. 1892, I/110.

17 Compagni D. 1996, III/14; Francesconi G. 2007, 1–27.

the city. We can read in *Croniche di Lucca* that in 1381, during the siege of Arezzo, even children fell victim to this as a brutal tactical element.¹⁸ In 1406, the chronicle reports that siege preparation could also be fraught with danger: Gambacorte, lord of Pisa, in fear of a possible Florentine blockade, collected the grain from the countryside and locked it in the city granaries. According to Sercambi, however, he miscalculated, because it was precisely this consideration that led to his downfall. The inhabitants of the *contado* began to starve and riot.¹⁹

A note from 1398 can represent a specific pattern of disasters. At that time, a severe windstorm hit Lucca. According to the chronicler, it blew from Rome and destroyed many buildings. Moreover, Giovanni Sercambi writes about how it cleared an entire forest. The author notes that the reason may have been the action of the anti-pope, for which God thus retaliated with his anger.²⁰ Although the bias of the author from Lucca in political matters is obvious, it can be established that the storm could have indeed raged at that time, because according to the Siena chronicler, in July 1398 the wind knocked down one of the city's bell towers.²¹ Next, it is worth considering a topic that had a great impact on the internal politics of Lucca at the time: regularly recurring epidemics.

'Bad Things Are Usually Followed by Bad Things'

Looking at Sercambi's descriptions of the major epidemics, it can be generally concluded that their cause — as with other representatives of European chronicle literature — was thought to be the questionable moral conduct of its citizens.²² The 'great deaths'²³, similar to the cited windstorm, appear as God's punishments in *Croniche di Lucca*.²⁴ The chronicler saw the antecedents not only in moral failings but also in wars and factional strife. According to Sercambi, instead of begging for forgiveness for their sins, people behaved even more sinfully.²⁵ The author of the *Croniche di Lucca* also mentions cause-and-effect relationships in terms of consequences. In the analysed chapters, the most common finding is the idea that bad things usually lead to

18 Sercambi G. 1892, I/167.

19 Sercambi G. 1892, II/109.

20 Sercambi G. 1892, I/591.

21 The tower of Santo Agustino church was collapsed. CTF 1939, 753.

22 Osheim D.J. 2012–2013, 91–93; Marshall L. 2016, 177–187.

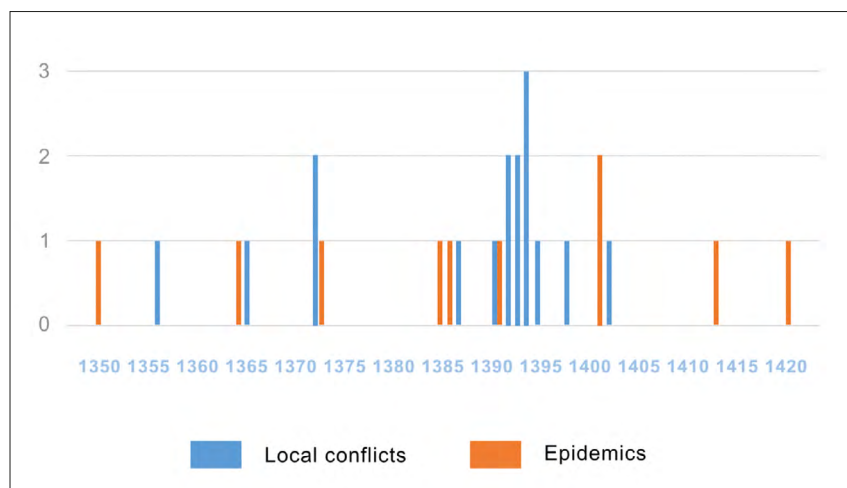
23 Sercambi used the expressions *moria*; *grande moria* instead of *plague* in the *caput* titles, which was the rhetorical tool of distance. Although in the main descriptions He used *pestilenza* too. Marafioti M. 2005, 326–327; Osheim D.J. 2012–2013, 91–93.

24 While Giovanni Villani often compared the causes of epidemics to astrological phenomena, Giovanni Sercambi, who was interested in politics, mentioned the immorality and hostility of people. About the characteristics of Villani: Palermo L. 1984, 343–375.

25 Sercambi G. 1892, I/320–321.

more bad things: *doppo l'uno male seguiti un' altro*;²⁶ *E perchè sempre le morie induceno altri mali*.²⁷ What influences could Giovanni Sercambi have in mind?

If we look at the *Croniche di Lucca*'s references to violent events and riots and compare them to the epidemics recorded by the chronicler, we can see that mass mortality was often followed by internal political conflicts in Lucca. Based on the lessons learnt from the diagram, we should take a closer look at the individual records of epidemics and the aftermath that they reveal.



Caption: The chronology of the violent urban conflicts and ‘Moria’ interpreted as epidemics in the *Croniche di Lucca*. The numbers indicate the number of chapters that report on a relevant case in a given year. On the one hand, this shows the quantity, and on the other hand, the protractedness, i.e. the importance, of a series of events. For technical reasons, the data in the diagram was narrowed down to the period of Sercambi’s life.

Chart 1. Violent internal conflicts and epidemics in Lucca (1348–1424)

Source: Author based on Sercambi G. 1892

Sercambi’s description of the plague epidemic of 1363 is preceded by a description of the contemporary wars fought by Lucca.²⁸ In the relevant chapter, we can read that the city had five thousand florins for the wages and supplies of the troops, which exhausted the coffers terribly.²⁹ The introductory passage of the following chapter, which presents the epidemic, makes it clear that Giovanni Sercambi may have

²⁶ Sercambi G. 1892, I/293.

²⁷ Sercambi G. 1892, I/152.

²⁸ Sercambi G. 1892, I/151.

²⁹ Sercambi G. 1892, I/151.

disapproved of the war. As the text states: ‘God, who knows everything, saw the cruel one’s warfare [...] therefore he sent death due to the cruelties of war.’³⁰ In the lines introducing the epidemic, we can read the following: ‘throughout Tuscany, but especially in Lucca, death was raging in Pisa too’;³¹ ‘Many people died, mainly fifteen-year-old children, and it lasted about a year.’³² The reference to the fifteen-year-old age group can be considered unique. The latter may indicate that those who died in the 1363 epidemic were mainly born after the Great Plague of 1348. At the same time, it is not worth drawing far-reaching conclusions since this detail could also be the chronicler’s personal experience. Sercambi was also fifteen years old at that time, from which we can also conclude that the chronicler may have been especially sensitive about deaths occurring in his age group.

Following the mention of Pisa, it is worth briefly examining the Pisan chronicles. Ranieri Sardo, who was a contemporary of Giovanni Sercambi, did not even mention the epidemic. At the same time, Jacopo Arroisti, who lived much later, devoted a large chapter to the subject. According to the latter, in 1363, half of the people died in Pisa — adults, women, and children alike. The feast of the Virgin Mary, which was crucial in the life of the city, could not be held. According to the Pisan historian, the epidemic lasted until November.³³ He also wrote that all this happened under the sign of Saturn, which was last seen in 1348.³⁴ Arroisti used this narrative device to draw a parallel between the Great Plague and the events of 1363. In contrast to it, in the second half of the 14th century, the Florentine chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani wrote only that there was a ‘huge mortality’ that year — without giving any details.³⁵ Although the contemporary Siennese chronicler, Donato di Neri, mentions that there was a great loss of life in Pisa that year due to epidemics and wars, in which many prominent citizens died, he does not mention that Siena — which was further south — was affected by the epidemic.³⁶ Comparing the lines of Sercambi and the Pisan chronicler with the accounts from Florence and Siena, it can be concluded that the 1363 epidemic affected Pisa and neighbouring Lucca exceptionally severely, meaning that it must have had a primarily local effect. Sercambi’s lines can therefore be

30 ‘Idio, il quale tutto cognosce, vedendo la guerra cruda e aspra, e acta a crescere più tosto che mancare, dispuose la sua providensa mandare una moria per la quale si rifrenasse la furia della guerra.’ Sercambi G. 1892, I/152.

31 ‘la dicta moria mandò in Lucca e in Pisa e per le parti di Toscana; ma principiò in Pisa e in Lucca,’ Sercambi G. 1892, I/152.

32 ‘molti ne morlanno & maximamente i più fanciulli da .XV. anni in giù.’ Sercambi G. 1892, I/152.

33 Arroisti I. 2016, 223.

34 Arroisti I. 2016, 223. Arroisti’s astrological comment is very similar to the findings that we can read in Villani’s chronicle about the earlier events. About Villani see the following: Palermo L. 1984, 351–352.

35 Stefani M. d. C. 1903, r. 691. It should be noted that the Florentine chronicler often recorded events factually, without moralizing. His entry on the 1363 epidemic is very brief, which perhaps indicates that Stefani did not attach much importance to it.

36 CDN 1939, 604–605.

considered unique. In *Croniche di Lucca*, not only is the description of the disaster detailed, but the immediate aftermath is as well. According to this, after the epidemic, two political groups were formed among the people of Lucca. One of these groups intended to deliver Lucca into the hands of the Florentines, while the other group consisted of local friends of Pisa. Among the former were Nicolao di Iohanni Diversi and Cholluccio Sornachi, who, according to Sercambi, were advocates of this school of thought. However, their conspiracy reached the ears of the people of Lucca, who were Pisan sympathisers. They immediately informed the neighbouring city's leaders, who promised that the rebels would not be punished if the others gave them up. However, the leaders of Pisa sent Bartolo di Arezzo, who (presumably with armed troops) beheaded eleven conspirators on the Vigil of St. Zita (i.e., 25 April)³⁷ in the main square of the city, in front of the church of Santo Regolo. Hearing this, the Florentine troops plundered the *contado* of Pisa, and some garrisons in Pisa territory were occupied.³⁸ This demonstrates that there was a possibility of a Florentine intervention. This is supported by Iacopo Arrostiti, who notes that a Florentine group of 1,500 men was preparing to intervene after the successful uprising in Lucca.³⁹

When the conspiracy was revealed, they ultimately did not approach the city. The Pisan historian does not describe the persons mentioned by Sercambi as its leader, but names the Obizi⁴⁰ clan. According to him, the *conservatore* of Lucca — who may be the same as Bartolo di Arezzo — sent more than a hundred people away. Many were punished, while others were executed.⁴¹ This is, in essence, consistent with Sercambi's account, as well as the fact that it all happened on the vigil of Saint Zita. The above-quoted idea of *Croniche di Lucca* ('one evil is followed by another evil') suggests that the author saw a connection between the epidemic and the conspiracy. This was suggested by Duane J. Osheim; however, according to him, the chronicler saw primarily moral reasons rather than political.⁴² It is important to note, however, that the larger context of the events of 1364 was the Pisa-Florence warfare, not the experience of the plague. Nevertheless, it may be suggested that the social crisis and insecurity associated with the disaster may have intensified the internal political conflicts fuelled by the war of the regional powers.

The experiences of the wave of deaths in 1363, even with the deduction of moral or even pro-peace lessons, were not a barrier to the continuation of the previously-started

37 This information is confirmed by the chronicle of Donato di Neri, in which we read that a hundred Luchese were captured and some were beheaded as rebels. CDN 1939, 605.

38 Sercambi G. 1892, I/153.

39 Arrostiti I. 2016, 223. Donato di Neri also mentions 1,500 Florentine soldiers on standby. CDN 1939, 605.

40 The Obizi was one of the five grandi families which were banished from the offices of Lucca in 1372. Meek C. 1987, 184.

41 Arrostiti I. 2016, 223.

42 Osheim D.J. 2012–2013, 103.

military actions: despite the plague, the political objectives and tools did not change. According to the *Croniche di Lucca*, the next epidemic broke out on 8 September 1371, the day of the feast of the Virgin Mary. According to the chronicler, it lasted more than two years (twenty-five months). He also mentions that it divided the city and the countryside population due to mortality on the one hand and regional migration on the other. According to the descriptions of Sercambi, people fled in fear from Lucca and its surroundings.⁴³ This phenomenon had a tangible effect on political life: the previously exiled groups wanted to take advantage of it; some of them considered acquiring the city.⁴⁴ The chronicler highlights the aforementioned Obizi clan, as in the earlier account concerning Pisa. Although the author did not state the connection explicitly, it can be assumed that acts of treason were attempted in some areas. Regarding this, we can read that the leaders of Lucca executed the captains of several rural fortresses.⁴⁵ Comparing the *Croniche di Lucca* with the works of other neighbouring cities, we can see that among the Pisan chronicles, this time, Sardo's work mentions the epidemic, while Arrostri is the one who is silent.

In the case of the former, however, the epidemic was not recorded in 1371, but in 1373, i.e., two years after the date indicated by Sercambi.⁴⁶ The dating is further complicated by the fact that Sercambi himself is also contradicted: in the introduction to the *Novelle*, he writes that there was a great death in 1374 in Lucca.⁴⁷ Martin Marafioti writes about the problem and presents several possible explanations. He cites the position of Di Francia, who argues that in this case the plague does not refer to an epidemic, but rather that it functions as a symbol of moral decay. Meanwhile, according to Löhmann, the date at the beginning of the short stories is the result of a transcription error and should instead be 1384.⁴⁸ Marafioti himself leans towards the latter.⁴⁹ It is worth considering an additional possibility. In the chronicle, it is emphasised that the epidemic appeared in September. This is also supported by the assumption of some researchers of historical epidemiology, according to which the plague may have had a seasonal nature and was most intense in autumn.⁵⁰ As to the flare-up

43 Sercambi G. 1892, I/240. Franca Leverotti examined the demographic data of the Lucca *contado* in several studies. He found that the population of the countryside surrounding the city had been continuously decreasing since the beginning of the 14th century. It can be shown that the repeated epidemics had a serious impact on the population of the area. From this point of view, Sercambi's descriptions of the vulnerability of the population are correct, but at the same time, the chronicler — obviously thanks to his own experiences — in some cases writes more about the migration of city dwellers to the countryside. Leverotti F. 1992, 71–86.; Leverotti F. 1999, Tabella 2–3.

44 Sercambi G. 1892, I/240.

45 Sercambi G. 1892, I/241.

46 Sardo R. 1845, 175.

47 Sercambi G. 1995, 53–54.

48 Marafioti M. 2005, 339.

49 Marafioti M. 2005, 339.

50 Ell S.R. 1984, 867.

in September, adding the twenty-five-month period mentioned by Sercambi, we can conclude that the mortality could have lasted until the end of 1373 and even until the beginning of 1374. Based on this, I believe that the dates given by Sercambi, and Sardo's dating, do not contradict each other. These details suggest that the events started earlier in Lucca than in Pisa, or that the epidemic of 1371 lasted longer than usual. Additionally, according to Sardo, 80% of twelve-year-old children fell victim.⁵¹ The *Cronaca senese* is also a useful reference point. According to Donato di Neri, where the epidemic broke out, no one survived. Although this is obviously an exaggeration, it should be emphasised that the deaths, according to him, primarily affected children.⁵² As he notes, 'anyone who did not see it with their own eyes would not believe it.'⁵³ We can again read about the involvement of the age group that was born during or shortly after the previous epidemic. Although in the case of Sercambi, it was due to personal involvement, and one may doubt the accuracy of what was written, it is worth briefly addressing the problem that different age groups may have been affected by the infection in different ways.

Stephen R. Ell, comparing the mortality data of several European regions and periods, found that, according to the data, the plague claimed the most victims among young men. The presentation of multiple points of view draws attention to three main factors. On the one hand, the ratio of children and young people was higher in medieval urban society; on the other hand, the community consisted mostly of mobile young men (so they were more likely to be infected); and thirdly, an iron-rich diet may have helped *Yersinia pestis* prevail in the body.⁵⁴ Ranieri Sardo also reports on an additional effect: according to him, grain became terribly expensive after the epidemic.⁵⁵

The next epidemic recorded by Sercambi broke out in 1383.⁵⁶ According to the author from Lucca, 'a great number of great citizens, men, women and children, died, and the death lasted until the end of the year 1384'.⁵⁷ Although he mentions fewer specific details this time, one aspect is worth noting for its great impact on domestic politics: the head of the Guinigi family, Francesco, died in 1384 too. In addition to these horrors, Sercambi also mentions that after the 'death' was over there was division in Lucca. Many in the city councils spoke against the interests of the Guinigi

51 Sardo R. 1845, 175.

52 CDN 1939, 655.

53 'non si credarebe chi veduto non l'avesse,' CDN 1939, 655.

54 Ell S.R. 1984, 871–876.

55 Sardo R. 1845, 175.

56 It is worth mentioning that, based on the description of Donato di Neri, the epidemic may have appeared in Siena as early as 1382, claiming an exceptionally high number of victims in June 1384. CDN 1939, 696.

57 'molti venerabili ciptadini, homini, donne e fanciulli in grande moltitudine, e durò la dieta moria infine all' anno di .mcccclxxxiiii.' Sercambi G. 1892, I/292.

family, while many exiles and rebels took advantage of the situation to slip back into the city. The chronicler again highlighted that among them was Giovanni degli Obizi.⁵⁸

The next similar event occurred in 1399. At that time, a serious epidemic — presumably plague — appeared in Lucca, which increased the dissatisfaction of the townspeople and those living in the *contado* with the city management; the epidemic also directly affected the Lucca elite.⁵⁹ Bartolomeo Guinigi, who would have been the head of the family, fell victim to the epidemic in May.⁶⁰ Sercambi describes him as a wise, big-hearted young man and a good man who lived in the love of God, whose death was a great loss for the supporters of the party.⁶¹ The situation was further worsened when in June Francesco's cousin, the ecclesiastical dignitary Lazzaro di Niccolò Guinigi, died. In July, his son Giovanni was also killed by the epidemic.⁶² The tragic events continued: Francesco's brother Michele Guinigi died in October. The seriousness of the situation is shown by the fact that, according to Sercambi, the Guinigi house was thus 'emptied',⁶³ and a few lines later, he states that the 'once huge family has significantly diminished'.⁶⁴ Also, at that time, one of their most influential supporters, Niccolò di Ser Pagani, who was fearless, bold and very wise, also left the ranks of the living.⁶⁵ The developments in domestic politics could not remain without consequences either, as the chronicler writes the following: 'numerous townspeople, who were minor friends of the house, spoke with disrespectful words and argued that the leadership of Lucca should be put in their hands'.⁶⁶ Paolo Guinigi and his followers responded to the critical political situation as best they could: they stabilised their position with the help of mercenaries and other armed people over Lucca. Paolo was elected as *Signore* by the city councils due to the presence of armed men; that is, they proclaimed him lord of the city.⁶⁷

Conclusions

Based on the sources presented, the plague epidemics that returned every ten years had an impact on the domestic and foreign policy of Lucca at the end of the 14th century. In 1363, the social uncertainty caused by the epidemic intensified the tendencies

58 Sercambi G. 1892, 1/293.

59 Meek C. 1987, 335–336.

60 Meek C. 1987, 336.

61 Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

62 Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

63 'Per le quali morti la casa de' Guinigi venne molto manchando, e così si sperava delli altri simile cazo'. Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

64 Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

65 Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

66 'Intanto che molti ciptadini poco amici di tal casa, con parole dizoneste parlando et tractando, la magioria di Lucha dovere in loro mani venire.' Sercambi G. 1892, 2/2.

67 Meek C. 1987, 341.

that led to the conspiracy against Pisa. The rulers of power gave a violent response and set an example with mass executions. In 1371 and 1384, revolts and military betrayals also occurred, in which the also aforementioned Obizi clan had an important role. From the repeated reprisals, we can conclude that the leadership in Lucca could only control the escalating conflicts by force. In 1400, the Guinigi clan was also in a threatening situation. As a solution, they resorted to violent intimidation and were able to create a monopoly by taking advantage of the chaos caused by the plague. It can, therefore, be concluded that the phrase used by Giovanni Sercambi, ‘bad things are usually followed by bad things’, was not just an empty phrase. The insight of the chronicler arose from the politics of his time. Epidemics could not directly lead to conspiracies — since the sources do not write about this — but during the social crises that followed, internal conflicts intensified. What could have been the additional factors that contributed to the development of violent incidents?

An examination of *Croniche di Lucca* and the Pisa sources reveals that the thin ruling layer in these cities was vulnerable, and, in some cases, their involvement may have led to a power vacuum. This tendency, and the ‘emptying’ of rural areas, could have also affected the fortresses and garrisons and been fatal for a medieval city-state. Sercambi also mentions regional migration, which also led to depopulation.

What Sercambi describes can be considered special from a historiographical point of view: he not only provides factual descriptions of the epidemics but also tries to discover the fundamental connections of the phenomena. However, these are not limited to the astrological observations that can be read in Villani or Arrostiti; rather, he tries to find political and social connections. This obviously stems from Giovanni Sercambi’s political learnings. In some cases, the connections may seem wrong; however, the recorded facts are supported in many cases by contemporary chroniclers.

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