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Plague and Politics in Genoa (1528-1664)

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Abstract

The article examines Genoese responses to plague during the old regime. Much like the Venetian, the Genoese ruling class understood the nexus between plague, poverty, and famine, and how these, in turn, tied in with political unrest. Some of the Republic's main political and diplomatic crises were indeed followed by severe outbreaks of plague. Thus, the 1528 plague marked the proclamation of the *oligarchic* Republic, as a Spanish protectorate, masterminded by Andrea Doria, whereas the 1579-1580 plague closed the civil wars (a struggle of the *old* patriciate against an alliance of the *new* patriciate with the *popular* faction, 1575-1576). While the plague that swept through northern Italy in 1628-1630 narrowly missed Genoa, it became a metaphor with Genoese political thinkers for the narrowly escaped annexation of the Republic by Charles Emmanuel I of Savoy (who died of plague in his encampment, together with scores of the *heretics* on his payroll). The 1656-1657 epidemic was the most severe in the Genoese old regime, capping an acute political and jurisdictional crisis with Rome and with archbishop Stefano Durazzo. Remarkable documents of this enduring state of conflict are the *prayer* composed by Paolo Foglietta (poet and brother to Oberto, who was a leader in the civil wars and later a historian of the Republic) invoking an end to the 1579-1580 epidemic, and the anonymous *preghiera repubblicana* (held at the Vatican Apostolic Archive) which the government of the Republic included in the official religious liturgy in response to a heated jurisdictional crisis with the Holy See (1605-1607). Rome ordered archbishop Orazio Spinola to have the prayer banned, but the 'Collegi' of the Republic attempted to have it reinstated following the 1656-1657 plague.

Keywords: *Famine, Genoese Republic, Plague, Political Crises, Prayer*

1. *Introduction. The Endurance of Epidemics in Political and Social Consciousness: The Interplay of Sanitary and Political Crises*

From accounts of the 1656 outbreak of plague in Naples, Paolo Preto has observed, we see how 'the revolt of Masaniello had left an open wound' which 'dramatically heightened' the perception of the negative impact of the epidemic on social and political relations (1987, 81; Villari 1994; D'Alessio 2003 and

2018).[1] Giulia Calvi had previously noted how 'the study of an outbreak of plague brings out disconcerting evidence … of unchanging recurrences across time and space' (1981, 405),[2] although what was witnessed with greatest force in Naples in 1656 was a signal re-enactment of the scenario of 1647. There is a vast body of evidence of the way the 'memory of past events and medico-political terminology dovetail significantly even when the historical antecedent is not called up overtly' (413), particularly in the letters of the papal nuncio in Naples, Giulio Spinola (born 1612, Genoa – died 1691, Rome), which provide an invaluable account of the epidemic.[3] While already a term of common and frequent usage, all references to *contagion* in Spinola's accounts are indicative of a deep sense of distress as the ghosts of the former *political plague* returned to haunt the city and the new infection reportedly broke out in the same three districts of the city in which 'nine years earlier the revolt of Masaniello had found support' (421). In 1656, echoes of the events of 1647 run through 'tutta la memoria della peste' (all recollections of the plague) 'as the same sites, occasions, and popular feeling were revisited'. 'The uprising of the *lazzari* in Naples and the shadow of their leader also pervade the extent of the writings of Parrino', official historian of the viceroyalty in Naples and mouthpiece for the Spanish government, in which 'the revolution and plague perfectly mirror each other as forms of contagion' (*ibid.*), present and past entwine, and the outward, contingent cause (the arrival of a ship from Sardinia), 'brings along the internal cause that will tear apart the community in the same way in which, nine years earlier, the revolt had spread and rent the social fabric' (421-422). Consciously playing on the plague/revolution nexus, Parrino reported that Masaniello's acolytes had returned to the city, seeking to exploit the plague to stir a 'nuova sedizione di popolo' (new popular rebellion) (423). In a consonant mode, the 'strategia vicereale' (viceroyal strategy) was to channel popular outrage against the *great enemies* of the Spanish monarchy by denouncing certain Frenchmen as plague-spreaders. The archetype on which both figures of an 'avvelenatore' (poisoner) and chief *conspirator* (upon whose instruction the poisoner purposely sowed the infection) were modelled was essentially that of the *political enemy* who 'from a position of ambiguous marginality threatens the unblemished solidity of the social group' (424).[4] Conversely, there also stood a host of heroes, benefactors, martyrs, and wonder-workers who promised to redeem the Neapolitans and lead them back to salvation through prayer, processions, the burning of candles and lanterns, and the miraculous deeds of relics. The plague again brought to light everything that 'the collective memory' (412-413) had not yet come to terms with: the suffering, mistakes, betrayals, and violence. Memory of the traumatic experience of 1647 was so enduring it could once again be seen to reverberate through the 1764 famine (448-449). The 1656 plague epidemic, that is, left such a lasting mark on the 'contemporary consciousness' (408), that it became an essential

> Link in the chain … of misfortune: the eruption of the Vesuvius in 1631, followed by the earthquake and revolutionary outbreak in 1647. The epidemic came to be seen as an episode within a sequence of calamities which afflicted the [social] group at regular intervals; the crisis can always … be inferred from similar crises in the past as each misfortune bears the signs of the next. (450-451)

[1] This and subsequent translations are mine.

[2] As Calvi says, 'the narratives, accounts, and "memories in times of plague" reproduce, with sombre solemnity, the *topoi* of an event that is more myth than fact, in a fixed, unchanging sequence' (1981, 405).

[3] On Giulio Spinola, see Moroni 1854, 295-296; Ruffini 2018, 149-161.

[4] In the letters from Nuncio Spinola, this topic emerges clearly: AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Napoli, Giulio Spinola, vol. 54, cc. 448r-449v, 17 May, 1656; cc. 456r-457v, *Relatione che si è avuta da Ministri Regij del Collaterale* (May 1656); cc458r-486v, 10 June, 1656; cc.498r-499v, 13 June 1656; vol. 55, cc. 127r-128v, 1 July, 1656.

With these analyses of Naples in mind, the Republic of Genoa stands out as a notable modern-age case study for its response to plague epidemics. The understanding of plague, the preventative and sanitary measures taken, and other forms of response are to be read in the light of the Republic's politics (both internal and foreign), social dynamics, and distinctly local elements of religious tradition. On more levels than the merely linguistic, plague and sedition came to be regarded, and sometimes conflated, as forms of infection, and sometimes were, but invariably were seen to be, reverberations and echoes of one another in some more or less direct causal or temporal relation. The anxiety of sedition (*political* contagion) was rooted in the Genoese mindset, not just among the direct witnesses of an epidemic wave. So, while the trauma of disease, isolation, and loss were obviously impressed in the memory of individuals, what Calvi calls 'political memory of the epidemic' (1984, 7) remains a neglected aspect of the politics and society of the Genoese old regime,[5] although it is clearly legible in the documents of eminent exponents of the Genoese old-regime ruling class, belonging to both the patriciate *old* and *new* (Spinola and Pallavicino, on the one hand, and Della Torre, on the other) and the emerging classes (Foglietta).

When compared with Giulia Calvi's analysis of Naples, two elements stand out foremost as peculiar to Genoa. In Genoa, the deep-set fear of political contagion owed largely to the civil wars of 1575-76, the memory of which haunted the Genoese over several generations; these were, in turn, understood as the reprise of former agitations (going back as far as 1356-1363, and the downfall and death of Simon Boccanegra, and then the more recent Rivolta delle Cappette of 1506-1507) (Taviani 2008 and 2021, 43-64, 75-88 and 100-104), and as the mainspring for subsequent popular conspiracies in the seventeenth century. While emphasis is rightly placed on the disorders of 1575-1576, the Genoese old regime was notorious for political instability. In book VII of Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia*, Genoa is seen to epitomise the plight of cities rent by infighting, where warring factions are an endemic political *plague*.[6] On another level, however, and much unlike the Neapolitans, the notion that plague could be *manufatta*, artificially instilled by plague-spreaders, had very little currency in Genoa. In this regard, the Genoese mindset was closer to the Venetian and Florentine, as several scholars have noted (Preto 1987, 19, 21; Assereto 2011, 131; Ascheri 2020) – though Venice, particularly, was a signal example of unity and concord.[7]

This article examines in further detail the conflation of plague and socio-political unrest in political and literary discourse (largely drawing on archival manuscript documents) and on the level of religious practices. Plague was a 'form of infection that defied all human reckoning … the cause of anxiety and uncertainty' that inevitably tied in with the idea of divine punishment and promoted 'inordinate recourse to religious practices' intended to atone for such excesses as lust and 'il mangiar troppo' (too much eating) (Sorcinelli 2009, 42-51). But when the beliefs and opinions of the Genoese are examined closely, it appears that political excesses were foremost in their minds and painfully acknowledged – sometimes in private statements of remorse,[8] and in one eminent instance in the intended form of a public *prayer* (Foglietta).

[5] Scholars, so far, have focused on demographics, economic and medical history, and provisions for plague management (the Genoese Magistrato di Sanità and care institutions responsible for handling health crises) (Presotto 1965; Lagomarsino 1976, 409-429; Rossi 1976, 393-408; Preto 1987, 19-30, 66, 73-80, 125-126, 267-279, 284-288 and 302-308; Pastore 1991, 173-203; Assereto 2011; Calcagno and Palermo 2017).

[6] Archivio di Stato di Torino (ASTo), CE, G, 1, *Memoriale del Popolo Genovese*, cc. 2v, 4v; Bitossi 2003, 393-397; Pacini 2007, 215-37; Taviani 2008, 2021, 43-64 and 75-104.

[7] Biblioteca Universitaria di Genova (BUG), B.VIII.29, 'Venetia' (Pocock 1975, 316-322).

[8] See Benjamin 2014, 123-156.

2. *The Plague and Socio-Political Unrest*

The 'sano scetticismo' (healthy scepticism, Assereto 2011, 132) the Genoese generally opposed to the notion that plague could be deliberately spread was shared by physicians and 'most of the ruling class' (Preto 1987, 19) alike and was undoubtedly a contributing factor in 'assuaging fears and indiscriminate acts of repression' (*ibid.*). By and large, that is, the Genoese gave little credence to rumours inspired by the theory of plague-spreaders so that not even during the 1656-1657 epidemic, when Genoa lost more than half its population,[9] were there any comparable instances of the manhunts and lynchings that had occurred in Milan in 1630 (Assereto 2011, 131), and took place in Naples during that same epidemic of 1656-1657.[10] This is not to say Genoa did not have its own share of believers in the idea that pestiferous lotions and powders could be concocted (Preto 1987, 21), or of superstitiously-minded individuals prone to seek supernatural causes and remedies for the disasters that periodically struck them. This particular epidemic, for instance, is known to have peaked in July-August 1657 after whole crowds had swarmed to the Cathedral of Saint Lawrence to be anointed with the blessed oil of the lamp that burnt in the cappella del Soccorso, and that was because rumour had spread that the oil rendered immune from plague (Lagomarsino 1976, 425). Essentially, however, the Genoese had the pragmatic mindset of a maritime and mercantile civilization, much like the Venetians and Florentines, and saw that the circulation of people and goods, while essential to trade relations, was also a likely vehicle of epidemics (Assereto 2011, 129-131). With reason, then, the Republic's emissaries devoted special attention to the office of gathering and communicating intelligence relating to suspected cases of the plague.[11] In the same vein, the damage caused by an epidemic was assessed, foremost, in terms of the financial setbacks it produced and dealt with accordingly. Thus, to alleviate the catastrophic effects of the 1656-1657 plague on the manufacturing industry, the city authorities responded by means of tax incentives and the establishment of the free port, designed to attract new skilled labour and the trade of Jewish and Eastern merchants.[12]

Readiness to believe that epidemics could be the work of plague-spreaders was part superstition, but usually betrayed some more substantial aspect of social and political imbalance; and yet, while Genoa considerably suffered from the latter, no alleged plague-spreaders were ever indicted and brought to trial (Assereto 2011, 130-131). Conversely, the Genoese ruling class and intellectuals were well aware of the links that, on the one hand, tied plague to poverty and famine and, on the other, to political unrest, and endeavoured to act upon the knowledge at times of crisis. Nonetheless, the gravest outbreaks of plague correlated rather closely with an exacerbation of socio-political strife, and epidemics were, perforce, not uncommon in a pivotal port city that stood as a gateway to the Italian peninsula (hence its name, from Lat. *ianua*: door).

The 1528 outbreak of the plague, for instance, was recorded as a 'grandissima e molto horribile pestilenza'[13] which caused the death of scores of eminent citizens and caused as many

[9] Possibly 60,000-70,000 individuals, out of a little over 100,000 total inhabitants (Presotto 1965, 353-355; Lagomarsino 1976, 409-429; Bitossi 1990, 291; Bitossi 2003, 391-508; Calcagno and Ferrando 2019, 117-147).

[10] As well as Liguria, the epidemic hit Sardinia, southern Italy, and the Papal States, and was the object of close study by contemporary analysts (Anonymous 1665, 1-5). See also Lagomarsino 1976, 411, 428; Del Panta 1980; Cipolla 1985; Henderson 2003, 481-499; Fosi 2007; Cipolla 2012.

[11] Thus, for instance, Ottavio Doria, consul of the Republic at Smyrna, upon receiving *rumori di peste* (rumours of pestilence) from Constantinople, Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASGe), AS, LC, T, 2703, Ottavio Doria to government, letters from December 12, May 9 and July 1667. See also Varlik 2015; Petitjean 2015, 215-232.

[12] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2367, Gio. Pietro Spinola, letters from June-July 1660; 2371, Ferdinando Raggi, letters from April-May 1666 (Costantini 1966, 95-108; Giacchero 1972; Zappia 2020, 119-145; Zappia 2021).

[13] ASGe, 265, c1v. in Assereto 2011, 19 (great and most horrible plague).

others to flee the city, so that 'nella città vedevasi una strage e solitudine miserabile'.[14] This wave occurred in the year in which Andrea Doria, who was *de facto* lord of the city, succeeded in his design to bring radical changes to the political structure of the Republic and its system of alliances, making Genoa at once an *oligarchic* Republic (in which only the aristocracy enrolled in the *Liber Nobilitatis Genuensis* could accede to government) and a Spanish ally.[15] At the same time, the magistrature of the Conservatori di Sanità was created for the prevention and management of epidemics and became a permanent organ in the framework of government.[16] In 1578-1580, there was another serious outbreak of plague, following the 1575-1576 civil war that ensued from the Habsburg default of 1575 and consequent financial crisis in Genoa. The atmosphere of the civil war, with its bitter infighting and aggravation in internal relations, is largely reflected in the intense pamphleteering activity of the period (most of which anonymous); eventually, a settlement was reached as the *old* and *new* patriciate agreed to equal political status.[17] The 'true union' (Pacini 2003, 381) between old and new nobles, Spanish ambassador Juan de Idiáquez wrote,[18] was a remarkable political achievement and gave substance to what the 1528 reforms had only obtained in principle. On the other hand, the *Leges Novae* did not address all the causes of conflict among social factions, once again excluding the faction of the *populares* from the chief magistratures. The *populares* were headed by exponents of the liberal professions (typically physicians, lawyers, and wealthy merchants) who had sided with the new patriciate in the civil war: from their standpoint, the settlement was a betrayal and kindled new recrimination and discontent that would trouble the Republic at least into the third decade of the seventeenth century and be the cause of several conspiracies.[19]

Given the underlying state of political conflict and recurring waves of epidemic, it is not surprising that to the minds of Genoese political thinkers (whose chronicles and treatises are still largely in manuscript form) plague should offer itself not merely as a rhetorical device but in the light of an actual, if indirect, perceived correlation between the state of the body politic and the devastating epidemics experienced in their times. In their treatment of the 1624-1625 war and subsequent popular conspiracies (1627-1629), Andrea Spinola (1562?-1631), Giulio Pallavicino (1558?-1635), and Raffaele Della Torre (1579-1666) all use plague imagery ('morbo', 'piaghe') to describe the seditious pamphlets that urged the populace to revolt. Della Torre, *consultore in jure* of the Republic and historian, recounted the Ansaldi-Vachero conspiracy (1627-1628) in the terms of a malaise affecting a weakened body and calling for adequate treatment:

> e questo fine al suo principio proportionato ebbe quella congiura, che da debolezza di governo nata nella Republica Genovese, non altrimente che per debolezza di calor vitale ne i corpi umani nascono le fistole, fuorché dal ferro, e dal fuoco rifiutava ogn'altra cura, la quale benché felicemente riuscita, poco averebbe a più longa durata dalla Republica proceduto … se con la istituzione d'un nuovo Magistrato in essa d'Inquisitori di Stato … con potestà assoluta di riseccare dalle Radici l'origine di tanti mali, non si

[14] ASGe, 265, c1v. in Assereto 2011, 19 (carnage and miserable solitude were to be seen in the city).

[15] BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Leggi del 28'. See also Savelli 1981, 49-52; Bitossi 1990, 22-27; Pacini 1999; Kirk 2005, 47.

[16] The activities of the Conservatori di Sanità are documented as of 1530 (Assereto 2011, 19; Cipolla 1989b, 243-262).

[17] BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Leggi del 76'; Ciasca, 1951, 185-213; Doria 1976, 377-394; Savelli 1980, 82-105; Savelli 1981, 3-81; Bitossi 1990, 31-40; Kirk 2005, 45-66.

[18] Idiáquez greatly contributed to the drafting of the 1576 *Leges Noavae*, which determined the latter system of government of the Republic (Pacini 2003, 381-382).

[19] The conspiracies promoted by the 'nobile *nuovo*' (*new* noble) Bartolomeo Coronata, in 1577, by the 'dottor di leggi' (doctor of law) Gio. Girolamo Rosso and physician Gio. Gregorio Leveratto (1603), and several others (1627-1628, 1629) (Savelli 1975, 29-172; Ceccarelli 2018a, 13-14, 33-38, 47-107, 173 and 177).

fosse con proportionato stabilimento reso il Governo più rigoroso e più possente a consumare gli umori maligni, che ne i corpi grandi per corrotela della natura alla giornata vanno pullulando.[20]

Along similar lines wrote Giulio Pallavicino in his *Vero e distinto ragionamento* (A true and clear argument): 'sapendo che quando il corpo è pieno di mali humori i medici prima che fare altri rimedij, danno di mano a medicine per purgarlo. Lo stesso fecero essi Inquisitori di Stato, sciegliendo quei che più mordaci nel loro parlare si mostravano'.[21] And, still in the same vein, Pallavicino also commented on the death by plague of Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy, who, as a great enemy of the Genoese, had attempted to annex Liguria in 1624-1625 and lent support to the conspiracy of 1627-1628. The 'principe', Pallavicino wrote, had died in ignominy and paid for his sins by ending his life in a tent, struck by the very disease that was rife among his mercenary troops, a horde of heretic barbarians, 'canaglia ... infetta dall'Heresia Luterana, o Calvinista'[22], and 'morbo' (malaise) which 'haveria infettata tutta la Italia'.[23] 'Il Duca di Savoia era un grande Principe, non di meno non ha potuto schiffare a guisa di huomo privato il morire di peste, e si crede siano stati i suoi peccati, e l'inaudite sceleratezze, da lui comportate, fatte nelle contrade della Republica Genovese dal suo esercito l'anno 1625'.[24] While death by plague was in all instances regarded as 'defiling, barbarous' (Calvi 1984, 27), Pallavicino lends an overt political connotation to the death of Charles Emmanuel I. The Duke had *conspired* against the Republic and sought to undermine its freedom, *spreading political plague* and *religious infection* at once – and therefore deserving to die by the same *scourge*.

As one may expect, the Piedmontese engaged in the same kind of slander and political propaganda against their counterpart. Thus, Pietro Biandrà, the Piedmontese envoy in Paris, wrote to Charles Emmanuel I that 'questi Genovesi' were manifestly not 'ancora satij di procurar d'offender la reputatione di Vostra Altezza con le loro pestifere lingue',[25] whereas Valeriano

[20] ASCGe, 132, cc. 149-150 (And to such end, proportional to its inception, came that conspiracy, which from the weakness of government sprang within the Genoese Republic, no differently than a faintness of vital heat causes sores to form in human bodies, [and] no to other cure than fire and iron would it respond, which while successfully accomplished, not much longer would the Republic have lasted … if the institution of the new magistrature of Inquisitors of State … with absolute powers to cut at the root the source of so many ills, had not been proportionally established … to consume the ill humours that daily swarm the greater bodies due to natural corruption). See also Savelli 1989.

[21] ASCGe, 341, c. 219r (In the knowledge that when the body is full of ill humours, before seeking other remedies, physicians make use of medicines to purge it. The same did the State Inquisitors in choosing the ones whose speech was more mordacious). The metaphor that conflates plague/disease with conspiracy is again used in the *Vero e distinto ragionamento* with reference to that faction of the *populares* who identified themselves with the *Memoriale del Popolo Genovese* (1629-1630) (Memoir of the Genoese people), a pamphlet traditionally ascribed to the *doctor in law* Vincenzo Ligalupo and therefore known as the *Memoriale* or *Manifesto Ligalupo*: 'tale morbo era per infettare tutto il corpo, e ben presto cagionare qualche universale seditione, se non vi poneva gagliardo rimedio' (ASCGe, 341, cc. 209v- 210r) (the malaise was about to infect the entire body and soon cause some universal conspiracy if some strong remedy was not taken against it). See also, ASTo, CE, G, 1, *Memoriale del Popolo Genovese,* cc. 1r-10; Ceccarelli 2018a, 15, 23, 64, 80-99, 103-123 and 157-158.

[22] ASCGe, 341, c. 219r (villainous mob … infected by the Lutheran, or Calvinist, Heresy).

[23] ASCGe, 341, c. 219r (had infected all of Italy).

[24] ASCGe, 341, c. 219r (The Duke of Savoy was a great Prince, and yet could not escape dying of the plague like the common man, and it is thought it was on account of his sins, and the unspeakable villainies committed on his orders by his army in the territories of the Genoese Republic in the year 1625) (Ceccarelli 2018a, 95-98, 101-103, 128, 148, 163-166 and 183).

[25] ASTo, LM, F, 29, 1, Pietro Biandrà to the Duke of Savoy, 19 May 1628 (These Genoese [were not] yet sated of offending against the reputation of Your Highness with their pestiferous tongues).

Castiglione, historian of the Turin court, portrayed the *despotism* of the Republic's ruling class as 'malgoverno' (misrule) or 'contagiosa infermità' (contagious infirmity).[26]

Finally, there were also those among the Genoese patriciate who betrayed the Republic and sided with the Savoy enemy. Andrea Spinola repeatedly defined them all as 'pomi guasti' (rotten apples), and it must have seemed fitting to him that some of them, such as bishop Pier Francesco Costa, reportedly died, 'because of a plague carried by the Piedmontese army' (Stumpo 1984).[27] One way or another, their *ignoble* death paralleled their equally ignoble political conduct, and these cautionary narratives were handed down as lore (Ceccarelli 2018a, 95-140). In essence, the Genoese civil wars of 1575-1576 and the complex chain of events that unfolded in 1624-1629 conformed to the pattern of 'unchanging recurrences across time and space' (Calvi 1981, 405) described by Calvi in her study of the Naples revolt of 1647 and plague of 1656: in the chronicles and commentaries of the time, political infection was as lethal and contagious as plague, and the enemies, whether *instigators* or *agents*, were those who threatened to *poison* the State and its liberty.

Still, the wave of plague that swept through Italy (and particularly northern Italy) between 1628 and 1631 and killed Charles Emmanuel I actually spared the city of Genoa.[28] The next wave to reach Genoa came in 1648-1650 in the form of 'febbri maligne' (malignant fevers, probably spotted fever), and this time found the city in the throes of the wave of political agitations which culminated in the Balbi and Raggio conspiracies.[29] Speaking of the 'exacerbation … of social and political tensions' in times of plague and of the Balbi and Raggio conspiracies in particular, Alessandro Pastore has noted:

> The extent to which the conflicts and conspiracies that involved factions of the Genoese patriciate in the mid-seventeenth century, such as the Balbi conspiracy and the Raggio conspiracy, were prejudicial to the initiative of the ruling class as a whole and hindered its capacity to respond to the emergency remains a matter of speculation (1991, 65 and 203)

though the emergency was, once again, at once political and medical. The government of the Republic, at any rate, managed to issue poverty relief measures in an attempt to act upon the vicious circle between poverty, epidemic cycles, and social and political agitation (Cipolla and Doria 1982, 163-196; Assereto 2011, 70). The social welfare system of the Republic was already, in fact, one of the most advanced in the Modern age, with its virtuous synergy between public authorities and the private sector;[30] nonetheless, poverty remained endemic and a threat to the stability of the Republic. Political conspirators, for one thing, all shared the conviction they could easily manipulate the poor and channel their destitution into conspiracy.[31]

[26] ASTo, C, Storia della Real Casa, 14, *Della Vita*, XXV, c. 212r.

[27] See also BUG, F.VI.22, 'Albenga'. See also Alfani 2013, 408-430.

[28] On the plague of Finale, see Calcagno 2012, 96-161.

[29] Both waves of dissent were led by the so-called 'mobba' or 'cabilda dei gentiluomini', a small group of nobles which included two exponents of the 'nobiltà *nuova*', Giovan Paolo Balbi and Stefano Raggi; the latter were both banished (1647) and then indicted for conspiracy. Balbi managed to escape (in 1648), Raggi, though almost certainly innocent, was executed (1650) (Bitossi 1990, 253-278; Grendi 1997, 194-207, 326; Ceccarelli 2016).

[30] BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Hospitali' (Grendi 1975, 621-665; Del Lungo 1983, 213-238; Savelli 1984, 173-216; Grendi 1987, 281-306; Parma Armani 1988, 69-180; Solfaroli Camillocci 2002; Polonio 2004, 311-368; Naphy and Spicer 2006, 70-85; Assereto 2011; Stevens Crawshaw 2012, especially ch. 5, 'Dying in the Lazaretti'; Petti Balbi 2013, 111-150; Calcagno and Ferrando 2019, 125-152).

[31] In fact, the Genoese 'popolo minuto' (lower class) proved largely unresponsive to these attempted conspiracies (Ceccarelli 2018a, 47-67, 80-92 and 162-189).

The whole nexus of poverty and plague, and its further links with socio-economic distress and political dissent was closely analysed by Andrea Spinola. In his *Dizionario politico-filosofico* (or *Ricordi*), the subject is broken down under several headings, each approaching the causes, effects, and concomitant phenomena of plague from a different angle.[32] Spinola was probably the most perceptive modern-age Genoese theorist in the field of political science and had a great influence on his contemporaries; he also kept revising and updating his observations, analyses, and inferences until the time of his death, in 1631, as the 1625-1629 period of civil wars had compelled him to embark on a thorough revision of his work (which was never published, but circulated in manuscript form even beyond his immediate circle of friends and allies). In a similar way to Pallavicino (and unlike Della Torre), Spinola belonged to a generation that had been greatly affected by both conflict and plague, having witnessed the civil wars and subsequent epidemic in 1578-80, and reaching the end of his life as Milan (then governed by the renowned Ambrogio, a relative of his) was overcome by infection (Casoni 1691). In the entry given under the heading of 'Peste', Spinola noted, first of all, that although it had been often afflicted by plague, Genoa enjoyed a felicitous position, with constant sea breezes preventing stagnant air from settling in the city.[33] He understood that the port and its trade were a chief contributing factor (under 2., in the entry below), in combination with the vast numbers of people living in poverty (under 3.), and that cities struck by plague needed to make provisions against famine and speculation (under 4.):

1. Non ostante che la nostra Città sia d'aria sana, con tutto ciò ella è stata afflitta più volte dalla peste. 2. Da quella peste la quale nasce dall'infettione dell'aria, qui, per gratia di Dio, non se ne può quasi temere, possiamo ben temere di quella che viene da contaggione, alla quale le Città maritime soglion essere soggette, stante li forastieri e le mercantie, che per mare, e per terra, vengono da molte parti, da vicino, e da lontano. 3. Hoggidì la nostra Città corre risico di appestarsi più facilmente del solito stante tanta moltitudine soverchia, e bisognosissima che v'è, la quale io miro come cosa atta a partorir più sorte d'inconvenienti, e tutti pericolosi assai. 4. Guai a noi se hoggidì, scoprendosi qui una peste non si trovassimo gran proviggione di grani per molti mesi. 5. La peste dà tal volta occasione, e comodità a forestieri di invader lo Stato di quel Principe, o Republica che si trova afflitta da tal male.[34]

[32] Because Andrea Spinola would characteristically approach a subject from several angles, it is often necessary to collate several disparate entries to appreciate the main tenets of his thought (Bitossi 1981, 5-64; Ceccarelli 2018a, 162-184).

[33] It was commonly thought that corruption of the air caused the plague (the term for which was: 'infezione' [infection]), and that it would thus spread to most of the inhabitants of an infected area, and kill them, regardless of whether they'd had any contact with a plague victim. The air would become corrupted, the notion went, because of stagnant waters, unburied corpses, noxious exhalations from the fractures in the ground caused by earthquakes, or by animals that throve in filth. The contagion of one individual by another (through direct contact or by the exchange of infected items: what at the time was called 'contagio' [contagion]) was thought to be *secondary* to the plague itself (Rossi 1976, 393). On the so-called 'miasmal-humoral' theory, see Cipolla 1989b; Cipolla 2012, 83-108; Sansa 2002, 83-108; Sansa 2006, 93-109.

[34] BUG, B.VIII.28, 'Peste' (1. Although our city has healthy air, that notwithstanding it has been afflicted several times by the plague. 2. Of the plague that is caused by the infection of the air, here, by the grace of God, there is almost nothing to fear, [though] we may well fear of that which comes by contagion, to which maritime cities tend to be subject, on account of the foreigners and goods which by sea and by land come from all parts, near and afar. 3. At present our city runs the risk of being struck by plague more easily than usual on account of the superabundant and most needy multitudes, which is a thing I see apt to issue several sorts of inconveniences, all of which dangerous indeed. 4. Woe betide us if today, upon finding here a [case of the] plague we could not obtain a great supply of grains to last us many months. 5. The plague sometimes gives the opportunity, and ease to foreigners to invade the State of that Prince, or Republic that is afflicted by such disease). See also B.VIII.27, 'Limosine' and 'Lazaretto'; F.VI.22, 'Annona, o sia ufficio dell'Abondanza'.

In a system of cross-references between different entries in the dictionary, Spinola broke down analytically his views on the relation between plague, poverty, political instability, and the danger of riots and conspiracies.[35] Throughout the manuscript, however, the events of 1575-1576 recur as a constant preoccupation, as they were also for Pallavicino. We see this in his explication of the causal links between the threats of plague and foreign invasion given under 5. above, which echoes Pallavicino's denunciation of Charles Emmanuel I and reinforces the interpretation of the figurative contagion in the light of the real, and vice versa. On a different level, however, and in keeping with his rationalist positions, Spinola dismissed the notion that the disease could be the work of plague-spreaders and denounced as charlatans those who subscribed to it or, worse, exploited it for their own private ends. In this connection, his chief targets were the city's affluent grain-merchants (who clearly stood to capitalise on the fear of plague as much as its consequences) and eminent physicians.[36] The latter, Spinola had always held in special contempt; but, more generally, his hostility towards the 'charlatans' is a symptom of old nobility fears (as the class to which Spinola belonged) in the face of a rising bourgeoisie that was becoming better polished and educated, more numerous, and more vocal in its claims to government.[37] Once again, the plague was a political issue and an indicator of a fracture in the body politic of the city.

Leaving aside the particular motives for political controversy, Spinola's framing of the unsettled issue of infection was consistent with that of his friend Giovanni Battista Baliani, the author of a *Trattato della pestilenza*, generally acknowledged as 'politician and scientist of European renown' (Preto 1987, 21), and a friend of Galilei's. His observations of the 1630 plague in Milan had convinced Baliani that 'not contagion, but putrid air-borne vapours' (22) were behind plague infections and led him to dismiss as unsubstantiated the theory of intentional propagation (through ointments and the poisoning of food and water supplies).

The most violent outbreak of plague of the Genoese old regime came with the wave that first hit Naples, in 1656-1657, at the end of a crisis that was to upset the entire system of the Republic's international relations. In the early months of 1654, the century-old alliance between Genoa and Madrid suddenly found itself on the verge of collapse, inaugurating a spell of two years (1654-1655) that were to mark one of the lowest points in their relations. With the *Monarquía* facing insolvency and failing to meet its financial obligations to the Genoese, mutual recrimination soon gave way to diplomatic and trade reprisals, eventually leading to military threats. As the main early outbreaks of the 1656-1657 plague occurred in Sardinia (then a Spanish dominion), the measures adopted by Genoa to contain the infection came to overlap and be confused with the hostilities already in place: when the Genoese authorities ordered several ships to be burnt with their entire cargo, ostensibly as a sanitary measure, Madrid retaliated by freezing the assets

[35] AAV, Fondo Pio 28.V, A. Spinola, *Osservazioni*, *Piaghe della Republica di Genova*, c. 130v; ASCGe, 1072, *Fosse di grano*; BUG, B.VIII.26, 'Discordia Civile', 'Disuguaglianza Civile', 'Divisione degli habitatori della Città', 'Fattioni', 'Fame and 'Fondachi'; B.VIII.27, 'Guerra', 'Guerra Civile' and 'Gocciole publiche'; B.VIII.28, 'Plebe' and 'Popolo della Città'. See also Ceccarelli 2018a, 97-98.

[36] BUG, B.VIII.28, 'Peste': 'Mi sono accorto più volte, in atto prattico, che coloro i quali vendono grani, si servono, come di luogo topico, di sparger volentieri ch'abbiamo la peste da vicino, elefanti di formiche, per far crescere il prezzo de grani' (I have often seen it occur in practice, that those who sell grains resort to the argument, and spread the rumour at leisure, that the plague is in our proximities, [making] elephants out of ants, so as to inflate the price of their grains). See also B.VIII.25, 'Bussole'; B.VIII.26, 'Donne'; B.VIII.27, 'Medici': 'chi vuol viver sano, stia lontano da i Medici … i Medici possono ammazzar gli huomini impunemente' (whoever wishes to live healthily should keep away from Physicians … Physicians may kill any man with impunity).

[37] See, *inter alia*, Bertini 1699; Gandini 1757; Pitrè 1910, 90-98; Camporesi 1981, 81-89; Brambilla 1982, 79-180; Brambilla 1984, 3-147; Gentilcore 1997, 93-131; Pasini 2004, 445-488; Pastore 2006, 15-26; Andretta 2008, 207-255; Benvenuto 2013; Cosmacini 2018.

of the Republic's transactors (Casoni 1831, 392-393; Vitale 1934, viii; Lagomarsino 1976, 410; Kirk 2011, 527-538; Pastore 1991). The alliance with Spain that had been cemented in the early days of the oligarchic Republic (1528) was clearly at an end; meanwhile, following decades of growing tensions, Genoese relations with the Holy See also took a sharp negative turn as Genoa denied its military support to Venice in the Cretan War (1645-1669). In an audience with the Genoese ambassador in September 1656, the newly elected Pope, Alexander VII Chigi, dubbed the Republic a State 'privo di amici' (friendless).[38] As the infection came to a climax, Genoa experienced a period of deep isolation in which even postal exchanges came to a virtual standstill, as we learn from the letters of Filippo Spinola, Genoa Postmaster general. After years of acting as a trusted courier between the Roman Curia and the Madrid nunciature, on 25 January 1657 Filippo Spinola wrote to the pope's nephew Flavio Chigi to beg that he be granted some time to re-organise his now deserted offices, stacked with neglected parcels and letters: the plague, he wrote, had caused the death 'di tutti li miei ufficiali' (of my entire staff).[39]

With greater evidence than in previous occasions, plague encroached on the Republic from without and, while public gatherings were known to increase the danger and needed to be limited as far as possible, the Genoese government at the same time strove to foster cohesion among the community in the struggle against a common enemy (Casoni 1831; Lagomarsino 1976, 409-429; Niccoli 1999; Taviani 2021, 89-107).

3. *Prayers, Benedictions, and Relics as Antidotes*

The range of devotional practices to which the Genoese resorted at times of pestilence deserve a special chapter in this discussion. The belief that political disorder and conflict were related to moral and spiritual disorder, at both the collective level and the individual, quite logically paired with the belief that acts of spiritual and physical cleansing such as prayer, benedictions, the worship of relics, wakes, and fasts could offer remedy. The damning representation of the Duke of Savoy and of the leaders of the 1627-1628 conspiracies by Giulio Pallavicino and other Genoese intellectuals illustrate one slant of this conflation of individual morality and political deed (Dupront 1993, 398-457; Ceccarelli 2018a, 105-157).

Going back half a century to the plague that came in the aftermath of the civil wars, we find a rather unique combination of civic, political, and medical themes delivered in the devotional forms of a prayer against the plague of 1578 ('Preghera per ra peste de 1578') (Verdino 1978, 106-111). The prayer was composed by Paolo Foglietta in the form of a vernacular poem and intended for all the people of Genoa to understand and recite. During the civil wars, Foglietta had initially urged the alliance of the *new* patriciate with the *populares*, but then decided that the peace settlement between the *old* patriciate and the *new* was the only viable course of action and backed it. In his own time, Paolo Foglietta was a poet and intellectual greatly admired by Torquato Tasso (arguably the greatest contemporary poet), although the achievements and reputation of his brother, Oberto Foglietta, eventually overshadowed his own so that Paolo was ultimately forgotten.[40] What we find in the 'Preghera' is a statement of civic engagement and a

[38] The pope 's'introdusse con ponderare la disgratia della Republica, in esser così poco fornita di amici, commemorando fra i male affetti Spagnuoli, Venetiani, Gran Duca e Savoia' (ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2356, 2365, Agostino Pinelli, 2 September, 1656) (opened by pondering the misfortune of the Republic, as having so few friends, citing among its ill associations the Spanish, Venetians, the Grand Duke and Savoy). See also Bacchion 1943; Pastine 1952, 5-23.

[39] AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Particolari 36, Filippo Spinola to Flavio Chigi, Genova, 25 January, 1657, c. 17r.

[40] Having risen to fame in the civil wars, Oberto then became one of the Republic's chroniclers. On Paolo and Oberto Foglietta, see Cotignoli 1905, 121-175; Vazzoler, 1970, 85-115; Verdino 1978, 105-125; Savelli 1980, 91-92; Savelli 1981, 39, 185; Costantini 1986, 253; Bitossi 1990, 38-39.

powerful political and moral message, delivered in the Genoese vernacular in preference to the more literary (and remote) Tuscan. Composed in 1578 at the very early signs of the new epidemic (and right at the end of the conspiracy headed by Bartolomeo Coronata, of the new patriciate),[41] the prayer never actually went to print; it remained among Foglietta's other manuscripts, probably because the full outbreak of plague (1579-1580), with its heavy death toll, plunged the city into a state of mourning that was to last for decades, causing the tenor and intent of the prayer (calling onto God to *avert* plague from the city) to appear superseded by events. The point of the 'Preghera', that is, had been to ward off plague alongside the *preventative* measures put in place by the authorities, as well as to foster concord among the Genoese: Foglietta truly hoped a mass act of devotion could forestall the risk of widespread infection and persuade the several city factions, including the *populares*, to lay aside their political claims. Popular dissent was far from quelled, however, kindling a trail of conspiracies that was to last five decades. When we look at the wording, we see Foglietta proposing a political solution to discord and infighting, aiming for unity among the Genoese over spiritual consolation. Explicit reference is made to the 1575-1576 struggles, amid other references to aspects of internal politics: the second stanza (ll. 5-10), thus addresses *war* and *division* and paints a vivid picture of the *old* nobles forced into voluntary exile and fleeing the city, as clashes with the *new* and the *populares* loomed. While 'fiacca' (feeble) in literary terms and inclining to 'mugugno' (whining) (Vazzoler 1970, 87-106; Verdino 1978, 108), the prayer testifies to the way plague infection and political contagion were bound together in the memory of the Genoese and remains rather exceptional, for its times, when judged on the merits of its linguistic features, contents, and expiatory ends.

The sequence of stanzas in the prayer is clearly defined: it opens with a supplication (ll. 1-28), followed by a description of the socio-economic consequences of the plague (ll. 29-52), a glorification of the Christian values shared by the Genoese (champions of the Church and leaders in the Crusades, ll. 53-83), an admission of collective moral and political guilt (for sparking off the civil wars), and finally closes on the prayer proper (begging forgiveness and divine protection, ll. 83-195) (Verdino 1978, 108-109; Niccoli 1999; Hammerling 2008). As a sample from this lengthy composition, let us take some of the more poignant stanzas from the first and final section (supplication and admission of sin/prayer):

Da ra peste esta cittè
guarda ben pietoso Dè
che goardase a no pò lè
senza Ti da morbitè. (ll. 1-4)[42]

Ti vei pù che pe ra goerra
d'esta nostra divixon
ri chiù ricchi d'esta terra
drizà testa chiù no pòn
e in negiella sforzè son
de lassà questa cittè. (ll. 5-10)[43]

[41] ASCGe, 353, Giulio Pallavicino, *Narratione della congiura che l'anno 1577 seguì nella Città di Genova* (Nuti 1983; Ceccarelli 2018a, 33-38, 47, 54-58, 80 and 89-92).

[42] (From the plague, merciful God, protect this city, for it cannot protect itself, without You, from the epidemic). This opening strophe is then repeated at the close of the prayer, ll. 192-195. The text is reported as transcribed and translated from the Genoese vernacular into Italian by Verdino 1978, 113-125.

[43] (You see also that, because of the war caused by this division among us, the richest in this land can no longer hold up their head and in shame must abandon this city).

Ro Comun nostro meschin
Per Ti libero è restao
de che gratie senza fin
A Ti rende questo stao
ma de peste esse amorbao
ro meschin teme aura assè. (ll. 17-22)[44]

Como Ti Poere Corteize
da Tiranni forestè
defendessi esto paeize
così goarde ancora lè
d'angonaggie e morbitè
ch'è pezò dra guerra assè. (ll. 23-28)[45]

Confessemo Cristie ancora
che derrè ri vitij andemo
de luxuria, pompa e gora
ni a ra drita ande voggiemo
perché ancora partezemo
chi rovina esta cittè. (ll. 83-88)[46]

Fa che drita ra baranza
dra giustizia staghe ben
perchè torta per usanza
ra tèn spesso ri cittèn
e se drita a no sta ben
torta ancon va ra cittè. (ll. 173-178)[47]

The main themes from Foglietta's prayer were later addressed by Andrea Spinola (he, too, a steadfast 'repubblichista', a firm supporter of the Republic, though far from an egalitarian), who saw opulence as the *plague* of any government, particularly in a republic: [48] 'la Corrottela che vien dal lusso si può dir veramente la peste di qualunque sorte di governo, ma in spetie delle Republiche libere, nelle quali, come i costumi dei cittadini cominciano ad essere corrotti dal lusso, snervati gl'animi, et i corpi ancora si comincia a correr all'in giù, verso l'occaso'.[49]

[44] (Our poor Municipality thanks to You remained free, and for that this State renders endless thanks to You, but now the poor have great fear of being infected by the plague).

[45] (In the way that You, gentle Father, defended this land from foreign tyrants, so again protect it from torments and the epidemic, which are far worse than war).

[46] (We further confess, o Christ, that we persist in the sins of lust, vainglory and gluttony, and do not seek the right path, because we still side with those who are the ruin of this city).

[47] (Hold the scales of justice level, for our citizens are wont to make them awry, and if justice is not level, awry goes the city too).

[48] The importance of social and political harmony; the advocation of a return to commerce and manufacture (as several Genoese now devoted themselves to finance alone); the condemnation of opulence, vogues, and the ostentation of wealth; the moral corruption of youths (Vazzoler 1970, 85-115; Verdino 1978, 105-125). See BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Lusso'; Spinola 1981; Ceccarelli 2018b.

[49] BUG, B.VIII.26, 'Corrottela' (The Corruption brought by opulence may well be called the plague of any form of government, but especially of free Republics, in which, as the morals of the population start to be corrupted by opulence, minds become weakened, and [so do] the bodies and then begins a downhill race, towards decline).

Hence, the importance Spinola too accorded to *intercessional* prayer, especially as a collective ritual. There are entries in his dictionary detailing the types of prayer that befit the Republican order (free cities) and those that should instead be banned. It was proper for the Genoese to pray, as congregations or individuals, in churches or private oratories, firstly for the preservation of the 'Signoria' (viz. the Republic), the Pope, and the Empire.[50] Overall, Spinola believed prayer gatherings, the public delivery of sermons ('orazioni fatte in pubblico'), and other devotional rites (processions and prayers of contrition) had the power to strengthen political unity and restore purity in the minds and conscience of individuals. They were, that is, a formidable and necessary tool, particularly in facing epidemics, famines, war, conspiracies, and other such crises.[51]

Not long before, Paolo Sarpi, the renowned controversialist and defender of the jurisdictional autonomy of the Republic of Venice against the Interdict (1605-1606), had also emphasised the value of collective prayer. Around 1610, as the ferment caused by the recent clash with Rome had not yet died down, Sarpi set to write the first two chapters of a treatise that was never completed and has only recently come to light (*Della potestà de' Prencipi*) (Of the authority of Princes), arguing that the highest authority in a Republic ('Principe repubblicano') ranked equal with an absolute prince. Under heading 23 of the treatise, Sarpi elaborated on the political functions served by collective prayer: 'Che il Prencipe deve far osservar il commandamento di Dio, che siano fatte per lui continue preghiere publiche nella Chiesa' (2006, 76).[52]

Conflicts between Genoa and the Holy See were generally less acute and never led to an interdict, though tensions peaked several times during the first half of the seventeenth century. Here too, the function of public prayer was a point of contention. A few years after Sarpi had written on the subject,[53] the 'Collegi' of the Genoese Republic ordered that all sung masses (in churches and convents belonging to the state and in private liturgies alike) include a prayer *pro Republica*, invoking God's protection from all calamities, and from pestilence especially. The vicar general refused to comply and immediately wrote to Rome, which soon banned the new prayer.[54]

[50] Praying for the generality of Christian princes would only come later. To Spinola's mind, his fellow citizens should abstain especially from praying for foreign princes and ministers (BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Oremus pro Imperatore nostro' and 'Orationi fatte in publico'; B.VIII.28, 'Preghiere publiche'; B.VIII.29, 'Viva la Signoria'). See also de Vivo 2012, especially section 2.4.1 ('I sermoni').

[51] ASCGe, 106.B.3, 'Congregationi, o siano Compagnie'. See also Chiu 2017; Chiu 2019, 27-44.

[52] (That the Prince must enforce God's commandment, that constant public prayers be promoted by him in the Church). See also Muir 1981, 23-48, 76-106; Infelise 2014, especially ch. I ('Il principe è il tutto') (The Prince is everything).

[53] Most likely around 1613. Head of the diocese of Genoa was then Orazio Spinola, created cardinal in 1606, AAV, Misc. Arm. I, vol. 153, cc. 151r-152v.

[54] The Roman Curia judged the new prayer the equivalent of a *pro Rege*, a customary form of prayer under absolute monarchies: allowing it would have been the same as implicitly promoting the Republic to the rank of a Sovereignty. It was also feared the 'Republican' prayer would supplant invocations to the Papacy and the Church (the *pro Pontefice* and *pro Ecclesia*), AAV, Misc. Arm. I, vol. 153, c. 152v: 'Fece instanza li dì passati la Republica di Genova al Vicario del Sig. Card. Spinola ch'ordinasse a tutti sacerdoti, secolari, et regolari, che nelle messe cantate, et private si aggiungesse un'oratione pro Republica. Ma come cosa nuova si scusò il Vicario di non poterlo fare senza darne prima conto al Signor Cardinale, et che se dalla Republica ne fusse richiesto havria facilmente procurato d'ottenere da Roma la gratia per quanto havesse potuto. Et perché sotto questa forma si verrebbe a levare quasi l'oratione solita pro Pontefice, nel pro Ecclesia, ha voluto metter in consideratione quel che passa, parendoli anco disdicevole che di ciò non li sia stata fatta parola alcuna dalla Repubblica, et di tutto raccomanda il secreto' (Some days ago the Republic of Genoa made a motion to the Vicar of Cardinal Spinola that he order all secular and regular priests to add an oration *pro Republica* to all sung and private masses. This being a new thing, the Vicar excused himself for not being able to comply without first informing the Cardinal, and [added] that if the Republic requested him

A far graver contention arose at the end of 1637, when Genoa crowned its doge and proclaimed the Virgin Mary State sovereign.[55] The ensuing dispute worsened during the pontificate of Innocent X Pamphilj (1644-1655) when it centred particularly on the matter of the *Mandylion* ('Holy Face of Edessa'), an ancient icon and relic believed to be a true likeness of Christ and held most sacred by the Genoese. The Roman Curia and archbishop Stefano Durazzo (1635-1664) had a plan to suppress the Basilian order, the ancient keepers of the church of Saint Bartholomew in which the *Mandylion* was held, and install the Barnabites in their place. The contention was, in fact, political, and rested on the loyalty the Basilians had shown towards the Republic (a loyalty that had been won through the conferment of numerous privileges over the centuries); the Genoese government thus challenged the suppression of the Basilian order by the Roman Curia and eventually ordered the occupation of the convent by its armed forces.[56] Meanwhile, a narrative was built around the *Mandylion* that glorified the sacred bond that tied the relic to the republican institutions. Thus, in 1639, the canon penitentiary of Saint Bartholomew's, Agostino Calcagnino, composed a book around the story of the *Mandylion* and the miracles it had performed to save the city from calamities and enemy attacks, causing the French to flee, for instance, and healing numerous Genoese (Calcagnino 1639; see also Bitio 1640). The founding legend relates to the plague of 1383-1384, which had been killing people at a rate of 900 deaths a week, Calcagnino and father Antero Maria Micone later estimated (the latter was a Discalced Augustinian who actively fought the plague of 1656-1657) (Pescetto 1846, 20). The plague of 1383-1384, Calcagnino duly noted, had also issued from the political crisis that ensued in 1363 following the death of Simon Boccanegra (whose re-election as doge had depended on the vote of the *populares*), which came at the height of a struggle among city factions and was probably due to poisoning. His successor and friend, Leonardo Montaldo, restored peace to the city, but soon had to face the greater threat posed by the plague. Taking the plague as a clear sign of God's displeasure, archbishop Giacomo Fieschi had ordered public acts of worship involving prayers and the bearing of holy relics in procession, but the plague continued to rage. That was when Montaldo, who had brought the *Mandylion* from Constantinople and secretly kept it in his palace, decided to make a gift of it to the city and place it

to do so he would easily endeavour to obtain such concession from Rome to the best of his powers. And because under this new form the customary prayer for the Pope, as part of the *pro Ecclesia*, would be all but eliminated, he has thought fit to subject the matter to consideration, further deeming it amiss that the latter fact had not been mentioned by the [representatives of the] Republic, and recommends the matter be kept secret).

[55] A decree issued on 29 December 1637 established the doge be attired in purple robe, and that on all solemn occasions wear the royal mantle and crown (Volpicella 1921; Vitale 1941, 29; Bottaro Palumbo 1991, 35-49; Zunckel 2011, 145-191).

[56] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2356, Cattaneo, letters from 19 and 30 January, 2 and 23 February, 23 and 30 March, 13 April, 20 July, 5 October, 30 November, 1647; 2357, Gio. Battista Lazagna, letters from 22 May and 20 June 1649; 2358, Gio. Battista Lazagna, letters from 25 September, 29 October, 2 and 12 November, 20 and 30 December 1650; 2358, Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 5, 12, 15 and 19 March, 12, 17, 22 and 28 April, 20 May, 10 and 17 June 1651; 2359, The government to Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 11 March, 3 and 29 April, 12 and 28 May, 2 June, 27 September, 6 November, 15 December, 1651; 2359, Lazzaro Maria Doria, letter from 23 September 1651; 2360, Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 23 July, 17 August, 7 September, 26 October, 16 November, 9 December 1652; 2361, The government to Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 15 January and 19 July 1652; 2361, Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 16 March, 7 and 28 June, 7 September, 2 and 22 November, 27 December 1652; 2362, Gio. Battista Lazagna, letters from 14 and 30 November 1650, 6 and 12 February 1651; 2362, The government to Lazzaro Maria Doria, letters from 7 and 28 March 1653; 2363, Agostino Pinelli, 21 March 1654; 2364, Agostino Pinelli, letters from 17 July, 20 and 28 October, 27 November 1655; 2365, Agostino Pinelli, letters from 15 and 22 January 1656; Barelli 1707, II and 329-330; Dufour Bozzo 2005, 69-88; Moroni 1840-1854, IV and 180-181; Torre 1995, xi-xx; Müller 2005, 89-108; Origone 2007, 105-115.

under the custody of the Basilians (whose origins as an order were Eastern, as were those of the precious relic). As Calcagnino relates the story, Montaldo died of plague immediately after making his will, but the plague finally subsided. The grieving Genoese honoured his death with a solemn state function and the commission of a statue to be placed inside the cathedral.[57]

In 1656, not long after the publication of Calcagnino's book, and in the very year in which the Barnabites replaced the suppressed order of the Basilians as custodians of Saint Bartholomew's and the *Mandylion*, a new epidemic broke out dramatically. This epidemic was eventually conquered as the Genoese government resumed amicable relations between the Holy See and archbishop Durazzo, who never abandoned his post at Genoa during the plague, ministering to the sick and assisting the poor with the help of his own family (Lagomarsino 1976, 420; Calcagno and Ferrando 2019, 117-147). We have a detailed record of the devotional acts that were ordered against this outbreak by local historian Filippo Casoni (1831). At the first signs of plague in the autumn of 1656, for instance, a council of theologians gathered and put a ban on all social events and individual behaviours that ran counter to religious piety (balls and other parties, inappropriate styles of dress, etc.); it also prescribed the dedication of new places of worship to the Virgin Mary, fasts, prayers, supplications for God's forgiveness, and the celebration of octaves for St. John the Baptist and St. Bernard across the state (Lagomarsino 1976, 415-419). The 'Collegi' approved all of the religious council's deliberations, while the Genoese resident ministers at the Holy See, Agostino Pinelli and Agostino Franzone, sought the consent of the Sacred Congregation of Rites for the new octaves.[58] Specifically, Pinelli wrote to the 'Collegi': 'veggo, con estremo mio sentimento, andarsi sempre più avanzando nella città i timori del contaggio, non ostante la grandissima premura della loro vigilanza in procurar di tenerlo lontano. Io ho confidenza che Dio benedetto, mediante l'opportuno ricorso delle loro

[57] 'Ma perché ben poco durano le mondane felicità, fu amareggiato sì lodevole reggimento da una fiera pestilenza che oppresse e danneggiò fuor di modo lo Stato Genovese, ed assai tosto crebbe di tal maniera, che per ogni settimana dentro di Genova novecento huomini e più cadevano estinti. Non erano pigri e rimessi i Magistrati a' quali era appoggiata la cura d'abbatter quest'Idra, che tutto dì germogliava terrori e morti. E Giacomo Fiesco, Arcivescovo in que' tempi, da gli humani rimedij ricorse a i Divini: posciaché mosso da compassione e da carità verso la sua Greggia, col Capitolo e canonici della catedrale, impose publiche preghiere per placar l'offesa Maestà d'Iddio: e con tutto il clero e popolo religiosamente intravenne ad una divota e supplichevole Processione, nella quale con molta pietà e lagrime si portarono le più segnalate reliquie, che in Genova si venerassero. Non con minor providenza si segnalò in questo avvenimento il saggio Duce; peroché non tralasciava cosa alcuna che potesse giovare a rimetter quel fiero morbo, invigilando arditamente alla cura de' suoi cittadini, e posponendo la propria vita alla salvezza commune. Ond'egli tosto ne cadde infermo, tocco dal corrente veleno. Conobbe il christiano Principe il suo pericolo, e per disporsi a render conto al supremo Giudice di sé, e de' suoi Popoli, chiamato a sé il confessore … . purgò con una diligente e seria confessione i suoi peccati' (Calcagnino 1639, 88-89) (But because worldly happiness does not last, such laudable Government was vexed by a fierce pestilence, which oppressed, and inordinately damaged the State of Genoa, and soon developed to such extent, that for every week inside Genoa nine hundred men, and more fell deceased. The Magistrates were not lazy, or remiss, upon whom rested the charge of destroying such Hydra, which all day germinated terrors, and deaths. And Archbishop Giacomo Fieschi at that time from human remedies resorted to the divine: and so moved by compassion, and by mercy towards his Flock, with the Chapter and Canons of the Cathedral he ordered public prayer to placate the offended Majesty of God: and with all of the Clergy, and population, religiously formed a devout, and supplicatory Procession, in which with great piety, and tears were borne the most notable Relics that were venerated in Genoa. No lesser Carefulness was shown in these circumstances by the wise Doge; for the fact that he neglected nothing, that could help remit the fierce disease, courageously attending to the assistance of his fellow citizens, and putting his own life after the common salvation. Whereby he soon fell ill, struck by the raging poison. The Christian Prince understood the peril he was in, and in order to be ready to account for himself and for his people before the supreme Judge, having summoned the Confessor … atoned for his sins with a scrupulous and serious confession).

[58] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2365, Agostino Pinelli, letters from 2, 23 and 26 December 1656; 2366, Agostino Franzone, 28 July 1657.

deliberationi, sia per placarsi e che vorrà … farci la gratia'.[59] He was hoping for the 'intercessione della Vergine Santissima Nostra Protettrice'[60] and stated his willingness to beseech the Pope for 'qualche Indulgenza' (some Indulgence) as well as permission 'di far l'ottava di S. Giovanni Decollato, e di S. Bernardo per tutto il Dominio della Republica'.[61] Franzone, for his own part, wrote that 'in tempi così calamitosi' (at such times of calamity) further occasions for collective prayer were required, together with acts of repentance and good works,[62] as these were the only remedies that could bring an end to 'the onslaught of death' (Delumeau 1987, 168).

In spite of these efforts, by November 1656 it was obvious the epidemic was far from over and a solemn blessing of the entire city was arranged. The most treasured of relics, the ashes of John the Baptist, patron saint of Genoa, were taken to the top of the dome of the cathedral for three nights running and raised to the sky in a ritual that involved hymns, prayers, and the tolling of bells in churches across the city, while the inhabitants were ordered to stay in their houses with their families and servants, kneel, and pray for God's mercy and the intercession of St. John the Baptist. The liturgy was again performed on 4 December, and once again was closely and devoutly attended by everyone. The plague, however, only really ended in the late months of 1657. On 26 December, the 'Collegi' sponsored city-wide celebrations, with a solemn mass accompanied by the *Te Deum*, the knell of all city bells, blank shots from the city fleet, and music all over the city. The ceremonies in thanksgiving, it is recorded, were also actively attended by archbishop Durazzo (Lagomarsino 1976, 421-429).

Over the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we may conclude, political connotations attached to outbreaks of plague in Genoa with particular emphasis on its causes and possible remedies. Against the various forms of *plague* that afflicted the Republic (Salbriggio 1655; Bitossi 2009, 105), frequent recourse was made to prayer – sometimes even with preventative intent. It became the ruling class to support these rituals of supplication and acts of charity, warned Andrea Spinola, which were necessary to temper the proverbial pride of the Genoese and dampen internal rivalries and conflict, fostering Christian piety, instead, and peace among the population.[63] It was a duty of all Republics to avoid political strife and civil wars 'come la peste' (like the plague), he wrote, which sets in when the body politic weakens and the moral fibre of the population wears out.[64]

The 1656-1657 plague is recorded by Filippo Casoni, annalist of the Republic, as the 'greatest tragedy Genoa ever suffered' (Parodi 2011, 14). Alongside numerous ex-votos, the impression left by the plague is captured in a canvas commissioned by the Senate to Domenico Fiasella that has only recently been recovered (having been lost and become part of a private collection). Its atmosphere is 'as monumental as it is despairingly tragic and lugubrious' (Boccardo 2020), showing the disintegration of the social, religious, and political body of the city. The cityscape is barely recognisable, affording no clear physical or temporal bearings but suspended,

[59] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2365, Agostino Pinelli, 2 December 1656 (I see, to my great distress, the danger of contagion making advance in the city, in spite of their keen vigilance in procuring to keep it at bay. I trust that the blessed God, through the apposite provisions by them deliberated, shall be appeased and will incline to … have mercy on us).

[60] (intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, Our Patron).

[61] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2365, Agostino Pinelli, 2 December 1656 (To recite the octave for St. John the Baptist, and for St. Bernard throughout the Domains of the Republic).

[62] ASGe, AS, LM, R, 2366, Agostino Franzone, 7 July 1657. Accordingly, the Genoese government responded to this epidemic by making particularly generous provisions in aid of the poor (Lagomarsino 1976, 419).

[63] ASCGe, 106.B.3, 'Congregationi, o siano Compagnie'; BUG, B.VIII.25, 'Casaccie'; B.VIII.27, 'Oratorij'.

[64] BUG, B.VIII.27, 'Guerra'; B.VIII.28, 'Peste'.

rather, in that state of *repetitious immobility* that is probably the most *disconcerting* feature of a wave of plague (Calvi 1981, 405). The civic and religious buildings in the background and the coulisses flanking the sides suggest the scene is set in the vicinity of the Palazzo ducale, the seat of government. The spirit of the city is captured by the lighthouse, in the same line of vision, but as a counterpoint, to the towering Reaper, its scythe raised, in the middle ground. As corpses are stacked and burnt, and the corpse-bearers either attend to their duties or plunder, Plague allegorised hovers over the city in a close visual likeness to traditional representations of Heresy (Parodi 2011, 19; Sansa 2006, 94).

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