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IN **HISTOIRE, ÉCONOMIE & SOCIÉTÉ** 2012/4 31e année , PAGES 3 TO 22

PUBLISHER **ARMAND COLIN**

ISSN 0752-5702

ISBN 9782200927745

DOI 10.3917/hes.124.0003

Uploaded: 01/16/2013

Article available online at

<https://shs.cairn.info/revue-histoire-economie-et-societe-2012-4-page-3?lang=en>



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Wartime mortality in Italy's Thirty Years War: The duchy of Parma 1635-1637

par Gregory Hanlon

Abstract

This research takes the measure of the demographic impact of the Thirty Years' War on northern Italy for the first time, focusing on the duchy of Parma and Piacenza allied to France. Instead of determining the dimensions of the pre-war compared to the post-war population, it studies the real mortality among soldiers as well as civilians. The calculations, which are approximative, reveal that the death toll among civilians was far greater than that of the soldiers, due mainly to hunger and disease. The principal difference with Germany's massive mortality was that this wartime mortality of circa 4% was inflicted in just a few short months of Spanish occupation.

Résumé

Cette recherche prend la mesure de l'impact démographique de la guerre de Trente Ans en Italie du Nord pour la première fois, axée sur le petit duché de Parme et de Plaisance, allié de la France. Plutôt que de déterminer les dimensions de la population globale avant et après la guerre, cette étude calcule les pertes réelles parmi les soldats et les civils. Les résultats, qui restent approximatifs, révèlent que les pertes parmi les civils dépassaient de très loin celles des militaires, suite à la faim et des maladies diverses. La différence principale par rapport à l'Allemagne fut que cette mortalité d'environ 4% de la population totale était infligée dans quelques mois seulement d'occupation par l'armée espagnole.

From a Black Legend to a blank slate

The Thirty Years War conjures up images of prolonged disasters whereby soldiers preyed on civilians and not only killed many, but destroyed the will to live of the survivors. Many of these images emerged from the time of the war itself, like the engravings by Jacques Callot, or in sensational printed accounts of atrocities soldiers committed in Germany. Soon after the war, the success of Grimmelshausen's picaresque novel *Simplicissimus* embroidered the picture still further. Early work from administrative archives that attempted to quantify the scale of the disaster only confirmed the artistic and literary impression. A generation of work by more careful scholars has corrected some of the most vivid caricatures, but the most recent estimation is that the intermittent wars in Germany between 1618 and

1648 resulted in a decline of population by about 40 percent overall, with some regions experiencing a population loss of over two-thirds¹. Both German and French historians agree that the wholesale slaughter of the civilian population by soldiers was quite rare, a figment of the partisan imagination. Historians now conclude that deprivation, sickness and hunger killed the majority of victims. The first was very often the result of soldiers burning the villages and towns. The bubonic plague, whose impact over the 'long' early seventeenth century has been tracked in Central Europe by Edward Eckert, then culled the population weakened by hunger and exposure².

But plague was perhaps not the principal scourge of northern Europe. "Wartime civilian mortality crises were precipitated by fatal epidemic diseases and starvation. Modern demographic historians attribute the starvation to military supply systems that stripped civilians of food and the means to acquire it, and the epidemics to decreased resistance to disease caused by undernutrition and to increased rates of disease brought about by enemy troop movements and civilian refugee flows³." Quentin Outram places more emphasis on war-induced famine on a large scale, which occurred not only because the soldiers seized food stocks from helpless rural populations, but because the war interrupted the crucial tasks of ploughing, sowing and reaping⁴.

Such catastrophic population decline overwhelmed a good portion of other territories in the general vicinity. Gerard Louis' diligent study of the Franche Comté concludes that the population declined by over half (55 to 60 percent) in just eight years (1635-1643)⁵. Lorraine was a battlefield for longer than most other regions, such that the first demographer to examine the data before and after the conflict speaks of a "*cataclysm démographique*", resulting in an overall population decline of 60.5 percent⁶. But comparing the total population before and after the war overestimates the fatalities by melding them with the countless numbers of refugees who fled to safer places for the duration of the hostilities. The number of people who died as a result of the war was therefore much smaller.

Wreaking devastation on the enemy was part and parcel of warfare for centuries before the late seventeenth century, just as reducing a hostile population into submission by hunger was a weapon wielded then as much as now⁷. The hugely influential *Aphorisms on the Art of War* by Raimondo Montecuccoli contain many references to the necessity of creating terror in the minds of civilians in occupied territories, but he also recommended sparing those

1. Ronald G Asch, « Wo der soldat hinkommt, da ist alles sein : Military violence and atrocities in the Thirty Years War re-examined », *German History*, 18, 2000, p. 291-309; on the historiography of the impact of the war, see Quentin Outram, «The socio-economic relations of warfare and the military mortality crises of the Thirty Years War», *Medical History*, 45, 2001, p. 151-184.

2. Edward A. Eckert, *The Structure of plagues and pestilences in early modern Europe: Central Europe, 1560-1640*, Basel, Karger, 1996.

3. Quentin Outram, «Demographic impact of early modern warfare», *Social Science History*, 26, 2002, p. 245-272.

4. Quentin Outram, «The Socioeconomic relations of warfare», art. cit.

5. Louis, *La guerre de Dix Ans 1634-1644*, Besançon, Les Belles Lettres, 1998, p. 287.

6. Marie-Josée Laperche-Fournel, cited in Stephane Gaber, *La Lorraine meurtrie*, 2nd edition, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1991, p. 4 ; see also Philippe Martin, *Une guerre de Trente Ans en Lorraine 1631-1661*, Metz, Éditions Serpenoise, 2002, p. 227.

7. For an overview of this timeless nasty practice, see Cormac O Grada, *Famine: A short history*, Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2009. Not all lands traversed by armies suffered durable harm. For a region (the rural Liégeois) spared the worst, see Myron P. Gutmann, «Putting crises in perspective: the impact of war on civilian populations in the seventeenth century», *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1977, p. 101-128.

who surrendered meekly. Much of what follows shows that the great military theorist of the age was merely describing the art of war as it was practised by his contemporaries⁸. His French contemporary, Antoine de Ville, left little to the imagination in his own handbook on war, published in 1639. He instructed commanders to ravage the enemy countryside, pillage whatever belonged to the inhabitants and set fire to everything else. It was good policy to ruin the harvests and the fields, and to take people hostage. The *chevalier* warned however that soldiers were to respect three things, churches and the clergy, the honour of women, and the lives of non-combatants, “*car cela offense dieu et invite sa vengeance*”⁹. These are normative prescriptions of course, whose application modern historians must yet confirm.

Studies of the Italian theatre of the Thirty Years War are exceedingly rare, even though the conflict arguably constitutes the most important event between the Council of Trent and the French Revolution. A quarter-century of conflict between France and Spain involved virtually every state but the Republic of Venice at one time or another. No historian has ever attempted to determine the demographic cost of the war in Italy over the entire period, although Guido Alfani's important book on mortality in Italy provides a model analysis which, alas!, the author brings to a halt with the great plague of 1630¹⁰. For the period of continuous hostilities after 1635, we are fortunate to have exceptionally rich documentation for the study of this problem in the duchy of Parma, which was a belligerent allied to France between the Franco-Savoyard invasion of the duchy of Milan in August 1635 and its withdrawal from the war early in 1637. Even though other regions, like the triangle of Novara-Turin-Alessandria, were contested over a longer period of time, Parma is one of the rare regions of Italy where the Mormons brought to fruition their ambitious project of systematically microfilming early modern parish registers.

Total war in Lombardy?

The correspondence of the leading French officials in Italy are replete with references to the deliberate destruction of food stocks in their theatre of operations. As it advanced across the duchy of Milan in May and June 1636, cavalry parties burned as much of the economic infrastructure in the rich Lombard plain as they could. It was their *policy* to block or deviate the canals that irrigated wheatfields, meadows and rice paddies, that fed Milan and the other cities. The Duke of Savoy Victor-Amedeus instructed his cavalry to kill any peasants who ventured out of castles to finish the harvest, and the generals noted with satisfaction how the countryside was devoid of inhabitants over a vast area northwest of Milan¹¹. Access to food for people and for animals was a central consideration in strategy,

8. These passages are reproduced as a separate chapter in the modern textbook by Marco Costa, *Psicologia militare: elementi di psicologia per gli appartenenti alle forze armate*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2003, p. 115-123; see also Thomas Mack Barker, *The Military intellectual and battle: Raimondo Montecucoli and the Thirty Years War*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1975.

9. Antoine de Ville, cited in Bernard Peschot, «Les 'lettres de feu': la petite guerre et les contributions paysannes au XVII^e siècle», *Les Villageois face à la guerre, XVe-XVIII^e siècle*, C. Desplat ed., Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2002, p. 129-142; Antoine de Ville, *Les fortifications du chevalier Antoine de Ville, contenant la manière de fortifier toute sorte de place ... avec l'attaque et les moyens de prendre les places...*, Lyon, 1636; see also Simon Pepper, «Aspects of operational art : communications, cannon and small war», *European Warfare 1350-1750*, F. Tallet & DJB Trim eds, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 181-202.

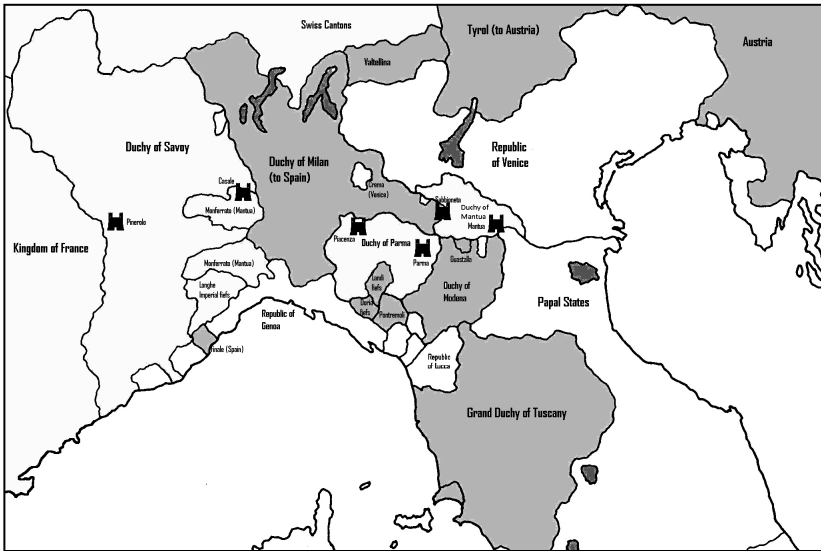
10. Guido Alfani, *Il Grand Tour dei Cavalieri dell'Apocalisse: L'Italia del "lungo Cinquecento" (1494-1629)*, Venice, Marsilio, 2010.

11. Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, Correspondance Politique (désormais AAE, C.P.), vol.24/2, letter from the ambassador accompanying the army Michel Particelli Hemery to king Louis XIII, 16 June 1636; Emery describes the intention of the Savoyard cavalry to destroy the canals feeding mills and rice-fields around

such that it necessitated drawing as much as possible from enemy sources. Even before the army moved off its starting point near Casale Monferrato in late May, small detachments probed Milanese territory nearby in order to seize castles and their stocks of food and fodder. Peasants streamed into the larger fortresses like Mortara and Novara with their crops and livestock, along with as much fodder as they could carry. Senior Spanish officials rushed to Genoa in search of provisions to feed Milan, which contained over 100,000 mouths without counting the refugees¹².

Young and vainglorious duke Odoardo Farnese, who craved military glory on the scale of Gustavus Adolphus, led his reluctant duchy into the Thirty Years war in 1635. Cardinal Richelieu promised him that the campaign against Spain in Lombardy would be short and successful, and fought entirely on foreign soil. However, the superiority of Spanish arms and the overextension of French operations soon made themselves felt. The failed campaign left duke Odoardo stranded in Piedmont, with no troops left to command and his own duchy very vulnerable to reprisal. During the first half of 1636, the duchy of Parma was a sideshow in the overall Italian theatre of the war, an irritant placed behind the centre of gravity of the Spanish positions. French and Italian troops (these latter being mercenaries in great majority recruited from neutral states) held firmly the two strongly fortified cities of Parma and Piacenza, but they were cut off from regular supply and reinforcement.

Fig. 1 – L'Italie politique en 1636



Warlords on both sides clearly conceived of food as a weapon. The armies supplied bread rations to each of the soldiers, ensuring that they would not die of hunger. Both

Novara and Mortara. He hoped the district would one day yield provisions to the army, but in the meantime cavalry patrols were instructed to burn all the crops still in the field and to kill any peasants who tried to harvest them.

12. *Gazette de France 1636*, n.3; dispatch from Rome 5 December 1635.

the French and Spanish authorities congratulated themselves that it never went lacking¹³. Whatever else the soldiers wished to eat, they could buy with their pay. The same authorities periodically disbursed money to the troops in garrison, but in a very irregular manner, while they issued pay to soldiers in the field army just at the outset of the campaign in order to lift their spirits. The soldiers expected to eat well, something the recruiters implicitly promised upon their enlistment. Troops in winter quarters were probably not paid their promised wages, but they still needed to be fed *like soldiers* if they were not to desert. In Parma, surviving records focused on the needs to provide the soldiers with food and the horses with fodder, this last perhaps more difficult to come by. Horses and mules devoured about 40 pounds of fodder each, every day, for 374½ cartloads¹⁴. We have details about the winter quarters for French soldiers in the large village of Fornovo, inhabited by about 400 or 500 people, not counting those scattered on farms in the district. In March and April 1636 Fornovo was host to 178 French infantrymen, who occupied 31 houses and villas, or roughly six to eight soldiers per house. These Frenchmen consumed 300 to 400 bread rations daily, plus 450 lbs of meat every day (!), and generous portions of wine as well. Even if the soldiers shared these rations with grooms, servants, women and others, the army diet compared very favourably to that of the peasants in whose houses they stayed¹⁵. The soldiers also needed beds and mattresses, bedding, tableware and kitchenware, and required store-rooms for their provisions of meat and wine. The ducal overseer or commissario for the mountain villages noted the provisions for straw, grain, beans, flour, wine and various kinds of meat, some pork and salami, but notably salt beef, lambs and goats, along with eggs, cheese, oil, lard, salt, pepper and candles. The officers, various marchesi, counts, barons and other cavalieri, had high standards and were not content with the stipulated fare¹⁶. In more genteel places, like Parma, the merchants and gentlemen took in the officers as their guests and then lodged the troopers around Parma in the hostelries and monasteries at the city's expense.

Commanders took care to replenish their finite food and fodder stocks by plundering enemy territory. Hostilities flared up along the border by late December or early January 1636, when the Lombard marchese Pozzolo, commander of militia in the Tortona district led men against Piacenza border villages and castles in search of livestock and other plunder¹⁷. Farnese sources describe these troops as bandits, and it is possible that they were at least in part rag-tag collections of armed men and outlaws pardoned in exchange for military service. Of course these raids triggered reprisals from Farnese territories almost immediately. This was a low-intensity conflict for the most part, not aimed at the destruction of the enemy army. Occasionally there were significant skirmishes resulting in dead and wounded on both sides, but the number of victims rarely numbered more than a dozen or a score. This was a classic 'little war' between neighbours who in normal times would co-operate in smuggling.

The arrival of several thousand professional soldiers and a strong corps of Savoyard cavalry at Christmas put great strain on the region's resources. Fodder was a scarce and precious commodity in a part of Europe so densely populated, a bulky commodity whose

13. AAE, C.P., Sardaigne 24, lettre de l'ambassadeur Hémery au Cardinal Richelieu, 2 July 1636.

14. Archivio di Stato di Parma (désormais ASPr), Governo Farnesiano, Milizie 36 ; Viveri alla Cavalleria Savoiarada.

15. ASPr Comune 1738, Truppe francesi 1636.

16. ASPr Governo Farnesiano, Carteggio Interno 384, 28 January 1636.

17. Giovanni Pietro Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, Bologna, N. Tebaldini, 1639-1642, vol.2, p. 296- 297 ; Biblioteca Palatina Parma (désormais BPPR), Ms Parmense 737, Calandrini, *L'Heroe d'Italia, ovvero Vita del Serenissimo Odoardo Farnese il Grande*, p. 613-25.

importation from neutral areas would be very costly¹⁸. A lack of fodder forced peasants to slaughter the oxen with which they worked the land. The presence of Spanish professional troops in the plain just across the border precluded collecting fodder from the duchy of Milan. The solution to feeding over winter a thousand cavalry in our little duchy was to take them to some neutral state judged too weak to defend itself; in this case, the duchy of Modena. Wagons escorted by militia soldiers who seized stocks of grain from wealthy landowners then trundled back to the palace in Parma to fill the storehouses¹⁹. But that immediately triggered the mobilization of the neighboring duchy which until then had stayed aloof from full-blown hostilities.

Lombard subjects of the king of Spain quartered five or six times as many soldiers relative to the population as wartime France, and so Habsburg strategy too demanded that enemy territories be seized and ‘eaten’ whenever possible²⁰. A small Spanish army occupied the western marches of the duchy near Piacenza in February 1636, and made strongholds of the towns they captured, Rottofreno and Castel San Giovanni. Having drawn attention to the Piacentino, Spanish and Modenese forces then advanced into the Parmigiano from the east on February 25, occupying the town and castle of Colorno near the Po almost without a fight. Colorno’s capture closed off shipments of grain to the duchy of Parma from the Papal States and Mantua²¹. The Spanish general Coronado intended to press on and overrun the whole district, looting the farms and removing the large livestock²². At this stage of the war, the Spanish did not intend to lay waste to the region, but merely deprive it of resources to their benefit, something Quentin Outram qualified as instrumental, “that is, it focused on the military requirements of food, fodder and other materiel and was not wantonly destructive²³.” Their forays episodically entailed marching large bodies of troops on a military target, but men operating in smaller groups plundered what they could. They were usually content to ‘refresh themselves after the German fashion’, which meant extorting money and food from the inhabitants on the threat of burning the buildings. Hoping for some easy pickings, Lombard militiamen from north of the Po crossed over the river too to share in the spoils.

The unwritten rules of seventeenth-century warfare recommended that places that surrendered without a fight deserved clemency, for it would be unwise to provoke the population into defending itself more vigourously. There were always intermediaries about who were ready to broker cease-fires in the interest of saving lives, generally priests and friars who appear in a myriad of roles as non-combatants appealing to the better angels of the soldiers. If there was any “imagined community” uniting the Italians with both French and Spanish belligerents, it was this shared attachment to the Catholic religion, whose ecclesiastics, and the friars in particular, were well-suited to arbitrate truces²⁴. There was also a great deal of ethnic and cultural proximity between the Lombards, Neapolitan,

18. Vittorio Siri, *Delle memorie recondite*, vol.7, Lyon, Anisson & Posuel, 1679, p. 399.

19. Odoardo Rombaldi, *Il duca Francesco I d'Este (1629-1658)*, Modena, Aedes Muratoriana, 1992, p. 23.

20. Archivio General Simancas, (désormais AGS) Estado, Legajo 3343/150 ; for the larger picture, see Davide Maffi, «“Un bastione incerto? L'esercito di Lombardia tra Filippo V e Carlo II (1630-1700)», *Guerra y Sociedad en la Monarquía Hispánica*, Enrique García Hemàn & Davide Maffi eds, Madrid, Editores CSIC, 2006.

21. AAE Paris, C.P., Sardaigne vol.24; letter from Hemery to Richelieu 23 March, 1636.

22. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, vol.2, pp. 303-305; see also BPPr Ms Parmense 1261, *Storia di Parma, dell'abbate Gozzi*, p.1114; for Colorno in particular, D. Costantino Canicetti, *Memoria di Colorno (1618-1674)*, Antonio Aliano ed., Colorno, Tipografia La Colornese, 1997, 24 February to 7 March 1636.

23. Outram, «The demographic impact of early modern warfare», art. cit.

24. On the importance of an “imagined community” embracing all the belligerents, *ibid*.

diverse Italian and Iberian soldiers in the army of the Catholic King and their Parman victims²⁵.

Wherever it was feasible the defenders put up stiffer resistance. French and Parman troops holding the principal castles and fortresses of the duchy left the Spaniards a free hand. In March 1636, Spanish forces under the Genoese prince Doria invaded the duchy across its Appenine border frontier, quickly capturing the district capital of Borgo Taro, which became a base for plundering operations in the mountainous valley of the upper Taro, densely populated with hillside hamlets. Bitterly fought encounters between the German soldiers and peasant militiamen and professional soldiers ensued in the following weeks, during one of which scores of invaders were reported killed and their bodies cremated in lime pits. Prince Doria and his accomplices then descended the Val di Nure, hitherto spared by invaders. They captured the mining town of Ferriere and burned or destroyed the forges and the tools that provided the Farnese with arms and ammunition. Further down the valley, they seized and plundered the town of Bettolle, an important commercial hub connecting the Po valley with the Mediterranean. A Parman column then advanced into the mountains in April, captured in retaliation the Doria mountain town of Santo Stefano d'Aveto, another active trading hub, and torched the warehouses containing oil and other bulky commodities²⁶.

In April most of the Spanish forces withdrew northwards to block the progress of the duc de Rohan out of the Alps, giving some respite to the population just as the harvest ripened. The Governor of Milan Leganés received substantial reinforcements from Germany, from Naples, from his allies in Tuscany and Modena too, but most of these he deployed farther west to prevent the Franco-Savoyard army from bringing relief to the Piacenza²⁷. The impending harvest in this rich district of northern Italy acquired great strategic value of its own. A regiment of German cavalry under Gilles de Haes consisting of about nine hundred troopers patrolled the district west of Piacenza with the aim of preventing peasants from bringing in the harvest. Other Spanish horse based on Rottofreno near Piacenza harried the peasantry similarly. Inside Rottofreno, the Spanish garrison commander induced the local population to help the soldiers fortify the place by releasing food stocks to them²⁸.

Duke Odoardo crept back into his duchy at the end of June 1636, after missing the full-scale battle of Tornavento, which was a bloody draw. The battle stopped cold the French invasion of Lombardy, and enabled Leganés to divert a strong detachment to deal with the duchy of Parma. Don Martin d'Aragon with a force of circa 1,500 cavalry and 3,000 professional infantry, and several thousand militiamen from the defensive lines along the Scrivia marched on Rottofreno with the aim of lifting the siege there. In the action of August 15, Odoardo's badly outnumbered cavalry broke and fled in disorder leaving the infantry behind, which also fled towards Piacenza after a brief fight. The estimates of men killed and captured varied from 150 to 900, although I am inclined to accept the lower

25. This theme is developed by the French officer comte de Souvigny, who depicts himself in the role as a magnanimous saviour of Lombard peasants defending the castle of S. Angelo near Novara. He negotiated the quick surrender of the place through the good offices of the parish priest. *Memoires du Comte de Souvigny, lieutenant-général des armées du roi*, ed. le Baron Ludovic de Contenson, vol. 1, 1613-1638, Paris, H. Laurens, 1906, p. 306 ; Barbara Donagan, *War in England, 1642-1649*, Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 130-137; Stephen Porter, *Destruction in the English Civil Wars*, Dover NH, A. Sutton, 1994, p. 31-32.

26. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, vol.2, p. 309; Calandrini, *L'Eroe d'Italia*, p.703.

27. Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu, Paris, 1838, Michaud & Poujoulat, p. 43 ; Gabriel de Mun, *Richelieu et la Maison de Savoie*, Paris, Plon, 1907, p. 124-127.

28. Sandrine Picaud, «La 'guerre de partis' au XVIIIe siècle en Europe», *Stratégique*, 88, 2007, p. 101-146 ; see also AAE Correspondance Politique Sardaigne, vol.24, letters of St Paul to Hémerly 29 April & 20 May 1636.

figure found in the French and Farnese sources²⁹. The results of the brief fight proved that the motley army of the duke of Parma was no match for the Spaniards in the open field.

Leganés would gladly have seized Piacenza and Parma by surprise or storm, but the Spanish general had a high opinion of the strength of the fortifications of both cities, and expected that his adversaries would be more resolute in the defence of the city walls. He could, on the other hand, asphyxiate the cities by occupying their rural hinterlands, which became feasible in the aftermath of the battle. Spanish troops first ravaged the countryside beyond the Trebbia from August 16 to 18, the terrorized inhabitants fleeing to Piacenza with their possessions³⁰. Then on August 19 Cardinal Trivulzio led his forces across the Po from the Cremonese, intent on occupying the rich plain and imposing ‘contributions’ on it. Over the next month, the combined Spanish forces invaded the duchy from three directions with the design of sucking from it all means of waging war. This time the Spaniards had come not merely to pressure duke Odoardo, but to exact retribution, “*giusta vendetta*” for his trespasses against them, and probably too with the intent of turning the population against the hapless duke, who had led them into this disaster³¹. With only two or three thousand professional soldiers under his orders, Odoardo could only watch as the Spanish forces did their worst.

The déluge of 1636

This destructive phase of the war corresponds entirely with what transpired simultaneously in Germany, but not all places suffered the same fate. Both the king of Spain and the duke of Parma conceived the war as a personal feud, where the subjects of each prince had no rights that soldiers had to respect³². It was a maxim that it was good policy to treat the vassals of one’s enemies courteously so as not to incite them to desperate resistance. In some instances, like the district beyond the Taro, the soldiers set the villages ablaze after their capture and plunder. A closer reading of the sources provides a more nuanced picture, however. Soldiers often removed doors and window shutters to make houses uninhabitable, they destroyed ploughs, farm vehicles, looms and other tools. The soldiers might torch buildings too, but the military code of the seventeenth century encouraged them to levy ‘contributions’ instead³³. When soldiers came to stay, there was always a threat of violence, but it was more opportune for the officers concerned for the survival of their soldiers to squeeze resources from the inhabitants over a longer period of time. Outlying hamlets suffered the worst because small parties of uncontrolled raiders could generally do whatever they wished on the spur of the moment. In larger communities, local authorities were anxious to collaborate with the invaders in order to keep the destruction to a minimum.

In Busseto, a small town with a wall and a corporate identity, Don Martino met the local assembly and demanded that they pay circa 31,000 lire. This was a huge sum impossible to pay immediately, so the general accepted a compromise. First, he wanted the grain that

29. Calandrini, *L'Eroe d'Italia*, p. 812.

30. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, vol.2, p.322.

31. Montglat, *Memoires de François de Paule de Clermont, marquis de Montglat*, Paris, Michaud & Poujoulat, 1838, p. 47.

32. Gualdo Priorato, *Il guerriero prudente*, p. 59; for war as large-scale feud justifying the spoliation of subjects, Fritz Redlich, *De Praeda Militari: Looting and booty 1500-1815*, Wiesbaden, F. Steiner, 1956, p. 2-4.

33. Porter, *Destruction in the English Civil Wars*, p.33; for Germany see Otto Ulbricht, «The experience of violence during the Thirty Years War: a look at the civilian victims», *Power, Violence and Mass Death in pre-modern and modern times*, J. Canning, H. Lehmann, J. Winter eds, Burlington VT & Aldershot UK, Ashgate, 2004, p. 97-129.

had been stockpiled there after being removed from the vulnerable farms in the district. Busseto also agreed to supply 200 rations of bread for the garrison daily and to provide firewood too. It was more efficient for Don Martino to leave the mechanics of this supply to the local notables, who forced the ecclesiastics to pay their share. The soldiers permitted inhabitants of the district to finish the harvest and plant the fields for the following year³⁴. In nearby Soragna, occupied by Spanish troops on August 29, there was a similar disparity of fate between the town and the country. In the countryside the soldiers led away the livestock and all they could carry, killing men, burning houses and generally doing their worst, according to a local inhabitant, who did not specify exactly where or when these incidents occurred. The local feudatory Gian Paolo Meli Lupi, who was a relative of Cardinal Trivulzio, travelled to nearby Cremona to obtain special treatment for his chief. Despite the hardship inflicted upon the inhabitants by the soldiery, people remained in their homes and planted the winter beans as usual³⁵. Spanish forces took up lodgings in similar walled towns, none of which put up a fight.

Having lost most of the minor centres, and concerned now to husband his remaining soldiers in the two principal cities and in a handful of 'improved' castles guarding important passages into the duchy, duke Odoardo instructed his officers *not* to defend the scores of feudal castles adjacent to the villages. A few of these retained some defensive value, so desperate peasants, sometimes under the direction of their lords, decided to remove their belongings inside the enclosures and to put up a fight to retain them, as in centuries past. The ancient castles might also serve as advanced bases from which troops could patrol the countryside, surprising the raiding parties and prying loose their booty. But in this capacity they were as useful to the invaders as they were to the inhabitants. Now, in the late summer and autumn of 1636, the invasion turned into a series of short sieges as the Spanish forces saw each unconquered castle as a treasure chest waiting to be unlocked. One of them, Reggiano, surrendered to the besiegers 150 large head of livestock and 1000 stara of wheat, enough to feed Don Martino's entire army for two weeks³⁶. These sieges followed a set protocol. In the plain, these castles generally only resisted until the cannon arrived. In the hills and the mountains, however, Spanish officers wished to avoid wintering their men in sterile and snowbound places³⁷. Thus, from mid-August to mid-December, enemy parties overran most of the duchy and planted garrisons in several dozen castles³⁸. These served as bases for patrols imposing contributions on the inhabitants, and places where they could collect the livestock and fodder for their army.

From September 1636 onward the panic became general in the duchy. Everywhere people were trying to guess which way the invaders would march next, and each rumour

34. Marco Boscarelli, «Occupazione militare spagnola e chimerica restaurazione pallaviciniana nello stato di Busseto (1636-1637)», *Contributi alla storia degli Stati Pallavicino di Busseto e Cortemaggiore (sec. XV-XVII)*, Parma, 1992, pp. 97-105; Marco Boscarelli, «Appunti sulle istituzioni e le campagne militari dei ducati di Parma e Piacenza in epoca farnesiana», *I Farnese: corti, guerra e nobiltà in Antico regime*, A. Bilotto & P. Del Negro & C. Mozzarelli eds, Rome, 1997, p. 561-78

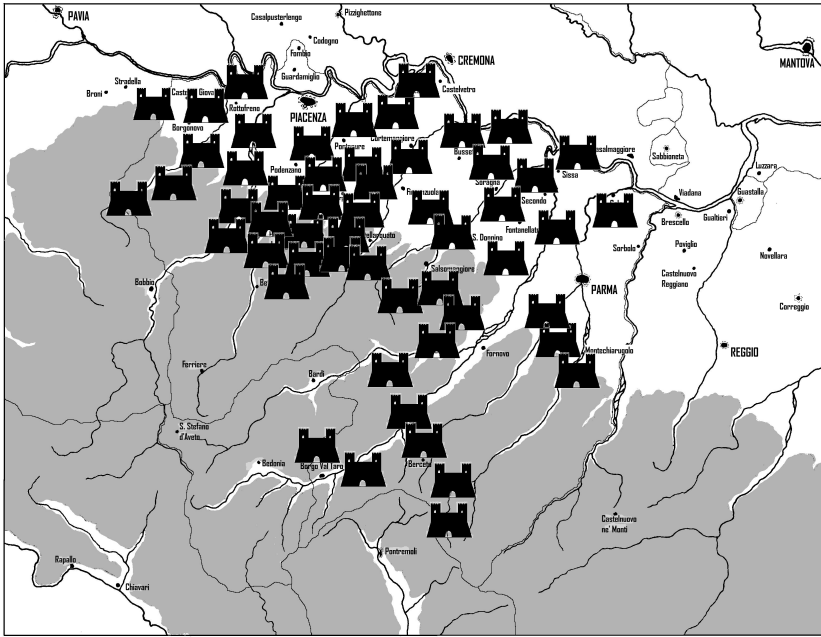
35. Antonio Boselli, «Cenni storici di letteratura dialettale parmense», *Cronaca di Pietro Belino*, 29 August 1636, *Archivio Storico per le Province Parmensi*, 5, 1905, p. 1-127 (cronaca (1601-1650) da Pietro Belino da Carzeto).

36. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, pp. 322-325.

37. Biblioteca Universitaria Bologna, Ms vol. 9E 27, Letter from D. Ventura, religious (no specified order) to Don Martin d'Aragona, 29 November 1636. The monk was a spy in Spanish service, reporting on the occupation of hilltop castles and the difficulty of supplying them over the coming winter.

38. AGS Estado, Legajo 3839; Nota de los castillos y puestos que sean ocupado ... desde 15 de Agosto hasta 17 de Diciembre 1636.

Fig. 2 – Castles occupied by the Spanish army, February to December 1636



triggered waves of departures towards the cities. “At least wait until they march in your direction before retiring!”, Odoardo ordered the garrison commander of the duchy’s third-largest town, Borgo San Donnino, whose walls had been dismantled by Spanish command decades earlier³⁹. A contemporary estimated that damages inflicted just on the Piacentino through fire and theft amounted to Scudi 8,530,000. Even wealthy people were ruined when enemy soldiers occupied their castles, or looted the houses in towns like Borgo San Donnino, Busseto, Fiorenzuola and Cortemaggiore⁴⁰. It is impossible to verify figures like these, but if they are fairly accurate, the 60 million lire in losses would amount to 240 lire per capita, probably the equivalent to two years’ income for the majority of the population. As the situation went from bad to worse, the cement that held society together, a sense of “imagined community” where empathetic reciprocity constituted the basis of interpersonal relations, began to dissolve⁴¹. A decree published in Parma on August 24 denounced the Farnese troops who were robbing peasants on pretext of obtaining forage, and threatened summary execution of the malefactors.

There were some refuges in the countryside; San Secondo filled up with people from the surrounding district for the late count had been a Spanish colonel. Castellarquato was a fief belonging to the important cardinal Sforza Pallavicino and the Spanish generals had no wish to antagonize Rome by loosing mercenaries on it. The immediate districts

39. ASPr Governo Farnesiano, Carteggio Farnesiano Interno 384, Letter from Ottavio Cerati to the duchess, 20 August 1636

40. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d’Italia*, vol.2, p.329; Ferrante Pallavicino, *Successi dell’anno MDCXXXVI*, Venice, Tomasini, 1638, p. 76.

41. Quentin Outram, «The Demographic impact of early modern warfare», art. cit.

around Parma and Piacenza remained under Farnese control, for strong columns of troops could sally forth during the day and do damage to the enemy patrols. But every night they retreated back to the safety of the fortress city. Peasants arrived in Parma and Piacenza with their carts and their oxen and other animals, with bags of grain and precious supplies, but there was no place to put them, and unscrupulous people, often foreign soldiers not bound by ties of long-term coexistence and kinship, soon devised ways to separate them from their belongings. The French soldiers still enjoyed impunity in Parma and Piacenza and so the inhabitants felt the need to acquire weapons of their own⁴².

In the countryside or in small towns garrisoned by the enemy, the inhabitants were entirely at the mercy of the soldiery and adventurous enemy civilians. People in fact did not complain overmuch of the behaviour of Spanish, Lombard or Neapolitan soldiers. Most of these were new levies and therefore had never before been billeted on enemy civilians. Magistrates of the king of Spain accompanied the troops in the field, and they sometimes ordered death sentences against soldiers who plundered churches⁴³. Odoardo's subjects directed most of their opprobrium at the Germans, especially the mounted arquebusiers called dragoons. Those troops had become inured to the brutality and the misery by now reigning unchecked in Central Europe. Even if they were recruited from Catholic districts, they did not belong to the same "imagined community" as their victims. Almost from the outset the stories of brutality towards civilians accompanied the claim, never supported by a place or a date, that peasants nailed German soldiers trees. Identical stories circulated widely in Germany too, although the incidents (studied by Geoffrey Mortimer) were rarely verified⁴⁴. Historians of the Thirty Years War in Germany conclude that most of the stories of atrocities were unfounded or exaggerated. Similar stories ran unchecked in Italy. A text from Fontanellato, unsupported by specific examples, claimed that the Germans were ferocious barbarians who killed people for no reason and destroyed houses like demons⁴⁵. The Germans, people complained, did not respect contribution agreements or safe-conducts. They cut off ears and noses of peasants to avenge themselves of ambushes and indignities. At Colecchio they reportedly attached five men to a beam and enclosed another eight in a room to die of hunger in order to induce them to reveal their hidden treasures⁴⁶. During the first two years of the war in Italy, only one wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants of a village, alongside the soldiers defending it occurred with certainty, at Montegrosso near Asti in Piedmont. It was attributed to the German soldiers under the command of Prince Borso d'Este of Modena⁴⁷. But we should not dismiss the rumours as mere propaganda.

42. ASPr Gridario 32, 24 August & 22 September 1636; ASPr Gridario 32, decrees focusing on public order multiply in August 1636, numbers 66, 67, 68, 70, 78, 82; BPPr, Ms Parmense 461, Diario di Andrea Pugolotti, Andrea Pugolotti recounts his own encounter with a French soldier enjoying impunity in Parma, *Libro di memorie*, 26 October 1636.

43. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, vol.2, p. 332; the Alessandria chronicle by Ghilini identifies one of these Spanish military magistrates, Francesco Anolfi, and describes his functions in the field, Ghilini (G) *Annali di Alessandria*, A. Bossola & G. Jachino eds., Alessandria 1903, 4 vols, p.120.

44. Pallavicino, *Successi del mondo dell'anno MDCXXXVI*, op.cit., p.24 ; for similar unverified stories current in Germany, see Geoffrey Mortimer, « Individual experience and perception of the Thirty Years War in eyewitness personal accounts », *German History*, 20 (2002) 141-160; Ronald G Asch, « Wo der soldat hinkommt, da ist alles sein », *art. cit.*; René Pillorget, « Populations civiles et troupes dans le Saint-Empire au cours de la guerre de Trente ans », *Guerre et pouvoir en Europe au XVII^e siècle*, H. Veyrier & V Barrie-Curien eds., Paris, H. Veyrier, 1991, p. 151-174 ; Gualdo Priorato, *Historia delle guerre*, p. 311.

45. BPPr Ms Parmense 462, *Miscellanea di Storia Parmense* (copy by abb. Affò), Da libri della chiesa di Corticelle, p. 314.

46. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, p.332; Calandrini, *L'Eroe d'Italia*, p. 834.

47. AGS Estado, Legajo 3344/205

The Spaniards shared this fear of the Germans in their employ. The authorities supplying the Germans in Farnese territory feared the consequences of withdrawing them to winter quarters in the state of Milan once peace was implemented. The exactions of German soldiers withdrawn to the district of Casalmaggiore during the winter of 1637, drove the townspeople into armed revolt, although tellingly neither murder nor torture were ascribed to them⁴⁸.

Contesting the control over the countryside and resisting the enemy onslaught gradually passed into the hands of Odoardo's subjects and the remaining French soldiers. Ducal authorities awarded a captain's commission to an officer designated as a 'partisan' Francesco Ferrari, called a '*huomo del popolo*' by the aristocrat Crescenzi Romani⁴⁹. Other officers created similar companies of mounted arquebusiers, who supported themselves on the resources they captured from the enemy. In Parma, the government decided to create a company of 120 Tagliatesta, "*gente scavestrata*" (reckless fellows?) who patrolled the roads every day. "*These people are the kind you had better respect, otherwise bad things will happen to you*⁵⁰!" Some accounts indicate that these companies attracted outlaws and peasants. Both sought booty and prisoners, but since they did not know or observe the rules of war, they often killed their captives. Enemy soldiers on unfamiliar territory often hired local boys and others as guides, who sometimes led them into fatal ambushes. These skirmishes signalled that the war was becoming more bitter as the winter set in. In January 1637 something like a pitched battle occurred at Medesano, where two German companies reportedly totalling 140 men were trapped and annihilated by *tagliatesti* and a crowd of peasant auxiliaries under marchese Ottaviano Mulazzano. The force slaughtered most of the invaders but spared one captain and fifteen men whom they escorted to the Santa Croce gate at Parma. There they butchered the prisoners one after another before a great crowd, and then placed the recovered booty on a table in a corner of the city square, where they auctioned it off⁵¹. Other groups of *tagliatesti* hovered around Spanish forces laying siege to the castle of Montechiarugolo. Calandrini claims the *tagliatesti* killed 4,000 enemy soldiers, which is completely implausible⁵². But with the multiplication of bloody encounters the Spaniards encountered ever greater difficulties obtaining fodder.

Odoardo could not be brought to the peace table merely by blockading him in Piacenza. There were plenty of provisions in the citadel, and peasants had brought a great deal of food with them. Livestock grazed in their thousands just outside the city walls and in the stalls throughout the city, and indeed, during daylight hours the open ground around the two cities would have looked like an immense feedlot. The Spanish blockade of Piacenza began to tighten at the end of October, with a penury of firewood and of wine. Soldiers solved the former problem by dismantling houses in the city, which must have deprived many refugees of shelter⁵³. In December, Leganes tightened the noose again. Cardinal Trivulzio's musketeers crossed the Po and attacked the floating mills on the Po outside the city, and towed downstream to Cremona those they did not sink. With Rivalta in Spanish hands, Leganés blocked the canal that brought water from the Trebbia to power mills in the city.

48. Ettore Lodi, *Memorie storiche di Casalmaggiore*, Enrico Cirani ed., Cremona, Turrin, 1992, p. 108-121.

49. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, p. 330.

50. Pugolotti, *Libro di memorie*, 22 July 1636.

51. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, p. 332; Calandrini, *L'Eroe d'Italia*, p.841-851.

52. Calandrini, *L'Eroe d'Italia*, p. 851-860.

53. Biblioteca Comunale Piacenza, Ms Pallastrelli 126, Croniche, o Diario del Rev. Sgr Benedetto Boselli, rettore della chiesa di St. Martino di Piacenza, 1620-1670, 15 September 1636; AAE, C.P., Parme vol.1, letter from Fabio Scotti to Cardinal Richelieu, 22 October 1636.

The garrison was well stocked with grain, but they would have to grind it into flour with the aid of animals and men, a laborious and expensive task⁵⁴. On December 20, Trivulzio's troops seized an island on the Po across from the city, where they threw up earthworks under cover of night and prepared positions for cannon. Several days later this battery bombarded the palace and houses in its vicinity. This was intended to unsettle Odoardo enough to make him think of peace. Parma was cut off from reliable communication with the duke. There, the price of grain rose to alarming levels of 40 lire a staio, despite fairly ample stocks of it⁵⁵. Refugees warmed themselves around bonfires set in the palace courtyard, where rumours of all kinds were rife.

Voices murmured that this time the Spanish were plotting with the Barberini papal nephews to remove the Farnese from their fiefs. Odoardo would still not hear of peace until close to Christmas 1636. Nevertheless as the discussions continued in the new year, hostilities gradually fell off, except for the *tagliateste* raids. The duke would have to expel his French troops from Parma and Piacenza (who would be allowed to march undisturbed to Piedmont). He would have to settle his dispute with duke Francesco of Modena with Spanish arbitration. With these better conditions, Odoardo's emissary signed the peace in Milan on February 2, 1637, to come into effect two days later. On February 4, the French soldiers marched out of the Porta San Lazzaro in Piacenza on the pretext of a pay muster, and the gates closed behind them. In the course of February Spanish troops began a gradual withdrawal from the duchy. A Farnese edict enjoined the population not to take anything already in the possession of the Spanish troops in order to accelerate their departure.

The human cost of the war

The exceptional wealth of Farnese muster records makes it possible to evaluate the risks that soldiers incurred waging a losing war against the Spaniards. The surviving company rosters for 1636 and the fragmentary hospital records give us some idea of the attrition units suffered over the course of the year⁵⁶. Farnese cavalry rosters indicated that merely 15 troopers had died during the year, half of whom were Odoardo's subjects. Although cavalrymen were continually committed to patrol duty in the open countryside, they were more expert foragers than the footsoldiers, and their mounts were able to carry them to safety. The rosters bear the names of 212 infantry fatalities over the year, for whom we know the origins for 92 per cent. Italians bore the brunt of the fatalities, at 119 of those for whom we have a sure origin, and of those, the subjects of the duke only numbered 33. French losses constituted about a quarter of the whole (49). These figures are surely only a fraction of the entire number, for the rosters only survive for a third of the companies we know existed, and some of them, especially the French, did not record the destiny of the soldiers. Even when we have the rosters, company scribes did not record all the deaths of members of the unit, for about 60 percent of the soldiers dying in hospital who should figure in the company rosters are not found there. So how many soldiers died in the war? By advancing tentatively from what we know to what we do not know, we should multiply the 227 military fatalities several times. We know nothing about militia fatalities, for none of their wartime rosters survives. Of course, only a portion of the fatalities were battlefield deaths, which we can surmise from the indications of the dates people were

54. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, p. 325-329.

55. Pugolotti, *Libro di memorie*, 10 November 1636.

56. The troop rosters in the Archivio di Stato of Parma contain the most complete information, Collatereria Generale 229 – 235 & 262 – 266 (cavalry) 317 – 318 (guard cavalry); Collatereria Generale 319 (guard infantry), 337 – 382 (infantry), 384 – 390 (infantry), 603 & 606 (garrisons of Parma & Borgo Taro citadels).

reported to have died. The worst single day was August 15, the action at Rottofreno, where the reported deaths number only 13 men. Even if we had all the rosters, and the militia rosters too, the toll of men killed in the battle would not likely rise above two or three score. Eleven more men figure as fatalities on December 10, probably victims of the fighting around Piacenza. The actions of May 15 to May 17 resulted in 18 deaths in the register. The numbers of people killed in the company rosters certainly understate the true losses and they are unlikely to represent more than a fraction of the total fatalities. They would only be valid for the Farnese side, leaving Spanish losses entirely in the dark. By arbitrarily picking a coefficient of three to determine the number of fatalities in Odoardo's army of 1636 and adding it to the hundred or so fatalities for 1635, the total number of professional soldiers who died would not likely be superior to 700 men, perhaps only a hundred of whom were ducal subjects. Throw in the militia defenders of towns and castles and the toll is still unlikely to surpass a thousand victims.

For every soldier killed, we might assume that two or three more were wounded, more or less seriously, removing them from active service⁵⁷. Then there were the prisoners who are no better tabulated. Most do not indicate a day of capture, but besides the dozen men killed at Rottofreno on August 15 we find 144 prisoners. Prisoners were held in some secure place like a castle or a tower, but not for the duration of the war due to the expense. The Italian soldiers taken prisoner by the Spaniards were given back to the duke of Parma, sometimes within a few weeks of their capture, where they re-enlisted in their old companies. No French or Swiss soldiers were handed over, however. Conventions between Spain and France for the fairly speedy exchange of prisoners existed elsewhere⁵⁸. An unknown portion of the Italians and Swiss might have signed on to fight with Spanish forces after their capture. There were three times as many desertions in the ranks of the army as there were recorded fatalities.

Determining the demographic cost of the war on civilians in Italy has rarely been attempted⁵⁹. In part, this reflects the extreme dispersion of the most important documents, the parish registers of baptism, marriage and burials. In other European countries, the campaign of Mormon missionaries to microfilm these makes it possible for researchers to consult these records at the nearest temple. In Italy, however, the Catholic Church, which objected to the religious use of this information by non-Catholics, soon brought the project to a halt. Only a few lucky dioceses have had their entire archive of parish registers microfilmed by the Mormons and made available to the public. Parma is one of the lucky few. For the diocese of Piacenza, only the city parishes and those of some towns and large villages in its hinterland are available. Most of the other registers sit on the shelves of the cabinets of parish rectories and cannot easily be consulted, even when the clergy permits it. I have examined the microfilmed mortuary registers of the dioceses of Parma and Piacenza

57. Only once have I encountered a report tabulating the number of wounded men relative to those killed outright. One anonymous report describing the battle of Tornavento summed up Spanish losses as 1,600 men killed and only 1,000 wounded. This appears suspiciously low to me, and may only include those who were not able to walk. Biblioteca Universitaria Bologna, Ms vol.473, Misc. H, n.15: *Relazione del fatto d'Arme seguito fra l'Esercito spagnolo e francese nella selva di Soma di là del Ticino e Tornavento e Ca' della Camera, il 22 giugno 1636*.

58. Geoffrey Parker, «The etiquette of atrocity: the laws of war in early modern Europe», *Empire, War and Faith in early modern Europe*, Harmondsworth UK, Penguin, 2002, p. 143-168.

59. For a valiant exception, see Franco Bertolli, «L'Invasione franco-sabauda del 1636 nel Novarese», *Il Ticino. Strutture, Storia e Società nel territorio tra Oleggio e Lonate Pozzolo*, Guido Amoretti ed., Gavirate, Nicolini, 1989, p. 51-70.

during the whole of the 1630s, in order to weigh the impact of the war during the years 1636 and 1637⁶⁰.

Whoever has worked on parish registers from the early seventeenth century will realize how frustrating they often are. The Council of Trent stipulated that the priests were supposed to keep careful records either in Latin or in Italian of every baptism, marriage and burial in separate registers, in chronological order. Baptismal and marriage records were vital in order to establish kinship proximity, and so were the first to be kept. Burial records do not become common until later, and were kept more irregularly. While parish priests were all literate by this time, they often kept the registers in their own particular way, such as recording burials in alphabetical order (by the given name!), or neglecting to note down the names of the persons who were not important to their parishioners, such as small infants or children reputed to be stillborn, or else by forgetting to include people just passing through the parish when they were surprised by the grim reaper. Fortunately, other priests, particularly in the larger parishes or towns where a better class of ecclesiastic operated, often gave precise ages of the people they buried, and reported on the cause of death. There is no uniformity, even in a single locality, for the registers often cover long periods of time, and so were kept by different priests. There are numerous chronological gaps in the same register, so not all the registers extant for our period are usable. For the diocese of Piacenza, while 41 mortuary registers survive from the period, only 35 were continuously kept throughout the majority of the decade of the 1630s, allowing me to use them. We are better served for the dioceses of Parma and Fidenza, and for those parishes of the diocese of Piacenza now situated in the modern province of Parma, for archivists there completed the work not finished by the Mormons. There, fully 140 parishes have mortuary registers dating from the period, but only 99 can be retained, 19 for the city of Parma (circa half the urban parishes), and 80 for the remaining diocese (about one-third). Even when the documents are continuous enough to be worthwhile examining, they still contain gaps (in fifteen instances), particularly during the period the enemy soldiers were present, for priests sometimes fled their parishes along with many of their parishioners. Let us not dwell overmuch on the limitations of the sources, for by studying registers of mortality we avoid the common error of comparing the population before and after the war. Examining the flow of burials during the 1630s will teach us more about the impact of the war than any other source. But we can still only expect to arrive at imperfect, approximate results.

Our method, then, is to compare the mean number of burials in two years of war, 1636 and 1637 with the mean number during six years of peace, that is 1632 to 1635, 1638 and 1639. The statistical significance of the numbers is subject to caution, for parishes could be large or small. Not all the burial registers reveal the existence of the war raging around them, either for reasons of statistical insignificance, or because the enemy soldiers never reached their communities. Nevertheless, of 134 parishes retained, only 28 of them (including 4 urban parishes) leave no telltale blip in the frequency of burials, and only in a single case was the mortality of the war years lower than the mean for the remainder of the decade. Even omitting the years of the catastrophic famine and plague in 1629 and 1630, the mortality in the immediate aftermath of the epidemic was bound to be lower than normal if only because most of the vulnerable people had died. I have omitted the year 1631 because its mortality appears significantly lower than the subsequent several years. Inversely, the massing of troops and the collection of supplies to feed them pushed up the

60. Parish registers microfilmed by the Mormons can be consulted at the nearest temple, but the call numbers of the individual reels are available on the internet. See www.familysearch.org, and the Family History Library Catalog.

mortality in 1635, before the war reached our territory. I hope that some of these anomalies will cancel each other out and that the increase of mortality in 1636 and 1637 will give us an approximation of the hardship caused by the conflict.

Let's examine the two urban centres first, for enemy soldiers never entered them. Each had an estimated population of 30,000 inhabitants in 1628, before the epidemic reduced it by at least a third. There is unfortunately no way of determining the population in 1634, but it was on the mend⁶¹. In Piacenza, which withstood the brunt of the danger, we can use 24 of the city's 52 parishes and compare the divergence between wartime and peacetime. The urban refuge was already home to at least a thousand professional soldiers, living in public buildings, in the citadel, in monasteries and in the unknown number of houses. Predictably, peasants and other people living in vulnerable places fled to the city to find safety. They were protected against famine at least, for most brought their animals and their foodstuffs too, but it was remarked that many of them had suffered greatly prior to their arrival⁶². The years 1636 and 1637 were traumatic for long-time citizens as well as the newcomers, for the mean annual number of burials for the same parishes was 1186.5 (2,373 over two years), an increase of over 250 percent over the mean of the years of peace which was 434.3 (2,606 over six years)⁶³. In Piacenza, if circa 900 people died annually during peacetime, the annual mean between July 1635 and June 1637 is probably close to 2,500, which would result in a wartime excess of 3,000 people over two years. While Parma suffered too, it was farther removed from the more intense fighting. Of the 19 usable parishes we can compare inside the city (just under half of the total, but not including the parish of the hospital) the annual average number of burials almost tripled during the war years, from 740 burials over six peace years (123.3 annually) to 641 interments over two years (320.5 annually)⁶⁴. It is more difficult to calculate the wartime excess mortality, although I doubt it was inferior to 1,000 people over the two years.

The countryside, including a score of walled towns, was far more vulnerable than the city. What of the fiefs in the countryside the Spanish commanders wished to spare? For San Secondo, friendly terms with Spain brought little relief. The annual average of just over 70 burials in peacetime (418 over six years) gave way to 400 burials (exactly) during the two years of war. In this town, we can estimate the excess war mortality at about 250 individuals, although some of these were refugees⁶⁵. Outlying parishes in the fief had burial rates only marginally higher than in peacetime, but I expect that many of the peasants fled their homes to the protection of the town, or indeed to Parma or Piacenza. The rural parishes in the Meli Lupi fief of Soragna did not enjoy much protection either⁶⁶. What of the towns which offered contributions to the invading army in exchange for good treatment? In the small city of Borgo San Donnino (today's Fidenza), the priests of three of the four parishes absented themselves during the turbulence. In the single parish, San Pietro Apostolo, where the records were continuous, wartime burials were *seven times* as high

61. Paola Subacchi, *La Ruota della fortuna: Arricchimento e promozione sociale in una città padana in età moderna*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1996, p. 32-35.

62. Crescenzi Romani, *Corona della nobiltà d'Italia*, p. 331; particularly eloquent is the parish register of S. Giuseppe which contained the principal city hospital, Microfilm reel 2201061.

63. These figures are still somewhat lower than the reality; there are gaps in two of the smaller parishes during the most acute phase of the war.

64. Again, defective record keeping masks the real number, which was higher. In two parishes the infant deaths appear to be suspiciously low.

65. San Secondo, Parma, Microfilm reel 787293.

66. Soragna, Parma, Microfilm reel 783146. We have continuous records for two of the town's outlying parishes, Carzeto and Castellina, but not for the town, unfortunately.

as those years of peace (42 over six years in peace, 100 exactly during 1636 and 1637)⁶⁷. This extreme upswing probably includes burials of people who belonged to the parishes with absent priests, although this is not always specifically indicated. The soldiers did not operate with complete impunity, for the burials included a young Milanese soldier who was shot by firing squad. In the small town of Zibello on the Po river, where about 25 people died in a normal year, the rector listed the names of 47 people he buried in January and February 1637, only 17 of whom were men, three of whom he listed as military casualties. I suspect the death toll to be higher, for this priest recorded very few infant deaths⁶⁸. The closer we move to Piacenza, the less surviving records are available, but important registers for four of the principal communities have been photographed. In peacetime, Fiorenzuola buried about seventy parishioners annually, but the invasion tripled those figures during the two years of the conflict (408 burials over six years of peace, 452 burials in 1636 and 1637). Only one appeared to have been killed when the German cavalymen attacked the town on 21 August. The excess mortality for that single parish would be in the range of 300 people⁶⁹. At Cortemaggiore, where much of the population fled into the church and the castle when the Spaniards arrived, Don Martino d'Aragon promised good treatment if people co-operated. But from the moment the soldiers arrived, the number of deaths began to shoot upwards; certainly over 200 in 1636, and a similar number the year after. In a town where the peacetime burials numbered about 70 annually, (just over 400 burials if we account for a six-month gap in the records in 1638, for a mean of 70.4 during peacetime, compared with 370 burials over 1636 and eleven months of 1637, for an annual mean of 185), the war caused a total excess mortality of about 250 individuals. At Cortemaggiore, the war killed about as many people as the plague, which carried off 225 people between August 1630 and March 1631⁷⁰.

The most extreme case in our records would be Castel San Giovanni, another walled town on the border with the Duchy of Milan, along the highway connecting Piacenza and Turin. In normal years, the priests buried about 70 people, but this figure more than doubled in 1635 for reasons that are unclear⁷¹. The Spanish army attacked Castel San Giovanni on February 15, which entailed a brief siege in which four parishioners died, although professional soldiers who were killed may not be included in our tally. The death toll began to rise almost immediately after the occupation, and at the height of the catastrophe, about five or six people died *every day*. The occupation of Castel San Giovanni by the Spanish army killed about twice as many people as the great plague of 1630-1631, when 364 people died over two years. It is difficult to determine the proportion of town dwellers who died, for we do not know the portion of the population that lived in the surrounding countryside. The gravity of the disaster is reflected also in the concomitant collapse of the number of baptisms, from a mean of 162.5 in the four harvest years of 1632-1635, to only 21 in the year after July 1 1636. This town did not fill up with refugees seeking shelter from the ravages of soldiers. Still other inhabitants of the town died in Piacenza or on the battlefield. I expect that Rottofreno, a town of similar size that suffered an enemy garrison for an even longer time, suffered much the same fate.

67. Borgo San Donnino, S. Pietro Apostolo, Microfilm reel 774756.

68. Zibello, Parma, Microfilm reel 784596

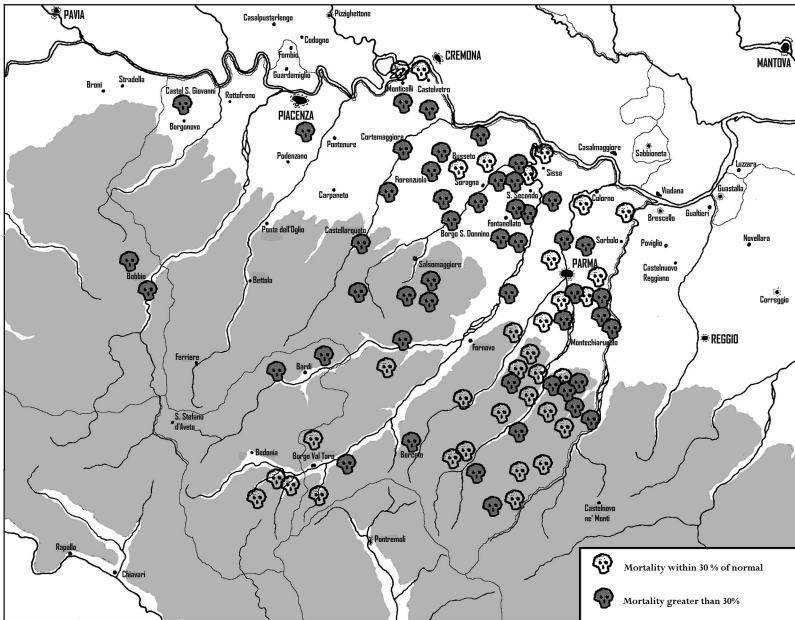
69. Fiorenzuola, Piacenza, Microfilm reel 2204436.

70. Cortemaggiore, Piacenza, Microfilm reel 2254647.

71. Castel San Giovanni, Piacenza, Microfilm reel 2211347; the priests buried 471 persons during six years of peace, 678 in 1636 and just 67 in 1637.

Hunger was the grim reaper in Castel San Giovanni but there were other killers at work elsewhere. Wars have always spread disease by lowering the already precarious standards of sanitation, and filling up protected places with refugees. The diseases they spread resembled the epidemics that were part of normal life before the nineteenth century. In the cities, which were well stocked with food, people still died of typhus and exposure. In the walled town of Castellarquato in the duchy of Piacenza, a fief of the church and therefore not visited by Spanish troops, the war triggered an epidemic of what might have been smallpox. Refugees fleeing there most likely brought the disease with them. In this town, which buried about 20 people every year, small children began to die in early September 1636, just two weeks after the Spanish invasion. Over the next four months, a long list of burials involving children aged 1 to 6 followed, with four or five infants dying every day at the peak of the epidemic. Almost 300 people died between September 1636 and March 1637⁷².

Fig. 3 – Rural mortality surge between July 1635 and June 1637



Source: burial registers, dioceses of Parma & Piacenza

Finally, there was another more diffuse and occult mortality that we have only recently discovered in Tuscany: the selective killing of newborns by married parents⁷³. Since this form of homicide was practically never brought before a tribunal, it has escaped notice of

72. Castell'arquato, Parma, Microfilm reel 2212560.

73. Gregory Hanlon, *Infanticidio dei coppie sposati nella Toscana moderna, secoli XVI-XVIII*, *Quaderni Storici*, 38, n.113, 2003, p. 453-498. A more synthetic version of this research is found in my book, *Human Nature in rural Tuscany: an early modern history*, London & New York, Palgrave, 2007; for Parma, see the research by Laura Hynes, «Routine infanticide by married couples? An assessment of baptismal records from seventeenth-century Parma», *Journal of Early Modern History*, 15, 2011, p. 507-530. Research on Aquitaine

historians. Unbaptized newborns were never recorded in the mortuary registers, for they bore no name or other social identity. But we can infer from the sex disparities of newborns figuring in the baptismal registers that this kind of infanticide was common in Emilia and in Aquitaine during the seventeenth century, and I suspect that it might have been a pan-European practice surviving into the nineteenth century, if not beyond. The death of an infant in the first days of life before he or she was baptized was no surprise to anyone. Parents likely decided at the moment of its birth whether or not to keep the infant, based on its sex, first of all, but probably also on whether or not they already had other children whose survival in hard times would have been compromised by the newcomer's demands on the mother. Newborn child murder should be seen, as Sarah Blaffer Hrdy says, as an act of love towards a small child⁷⁴. In Tuscany and in rural Aquitaine before the advent of widespread proto-industry, it made good sense for the parents to keep the boy and sacrifice the girl, who would need to be dowered, and who would leave home to live with another lineage. In Parma, on the other hand, where Laura Hynes has studied the phenomenon during this period, there was a stark contrast between the interests of the peasants outside the wall (who preferred boys) and the urban population, which kept the girls, particularly in the neighborhoods where the textile industry held sway. Indeed in this crisis year of 1636, the sex ratio of boys to girls among *baptized* infants was only 91 males for 100 females, instead of the universal 105. Something close to 15% of the newborn boys were killed by their mothers before the onset of nursing, which represents about 60 individuals. This practice flourished to a yet unknown extent in the countryside. In Cortemaggiore, a states of souls census for the town and its rural district undertaken nine years later suggests a dramatic imbalance for the children aged between 8 and 10, giving 38 boys and only 25 girls for the town and 24 boys and 16 girls for the rural district around it, implying that some 20 girls' lives were snuffed out just after birth. If we can generalize from Cortemaggiore, which contained somewhat under one percent of the duchy's population, we might imagine a tally of infant murders in the vicinity of 2,000 people⁷⁵.

The Thirty Years War did indeed inflict a German-style mortality on civilians in the path of the armies in Italy. From the material we have collected from the Parman countryside, it seems that soldiers indeed considered the enemy's belongings as their legitimate "dowry"; they certainly frightened civilians and sometimes tortured and killed them too. Soldiers often removed doors and window shutters to make houses uninhabitable, they destroyed ploughs, farm vehicles, looms and other tools⁷⁶. But clearly most people died either of epidemics caused by misery, or of the famine caused by the war, or some combination of the two. The death toll dropped off only when warmer weather returned in April and May 1637, months after the last enemy troops had left the territory. In the small duchy of Parma and Piacenza, we can evaluate the victims certainly in the thousands, likely more than 10,000 people, or at least 4 percent of the total population, of whom soldiers made up only a small proportion. This ignores additional population loss from the flood of refugees into neighboring territories (Mantua, Modena, Genoa, Lunigiana) and from the concomitant fall of natality. The principal difference with Germany lay in the *short duration* of the war, less

which I am presently conducting with the aid of graduate students, on Agen, on Layrac, Caudecoste, Nerac, Tonneins, Caudecoste and Astaffort has, to varying degrees, uncovered similar disparities.

74. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: a history of mothers, infants and natural selection*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1999.

75. Cortemaggiore, Piacenza, Microfilm reel 2272523, Status animarum 1640-1645.

76. Canicetti, *Memoria di Colorno*, 25 February 1637.

than two years, with the occupation of the duchy by the enemy army for circa six months. The dreaded bubonic plague did not make another appearance in Lombardy, despite an outbreak in the nearby Valtellina. In fact, the population losses due to the war were merely a small fraction relative to the 80 or 100,000 local victims of the epidemic just a few years previous⁷⁷. Parma and Piacenza only comprise a small portion of the area fought over by French and Spanish armies, however. The war may have depressed both population growth and economic development over much of Italy for several decades after 1630. Until someone photographs the parish registers over thousands of individual communities in order to facilitate the work of historians, we will remain unable to determine the direct demographic impact of war on other places.

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77. For the impact of the plague on northern Italy as a whole, see the indispensable recent work of Guido Alfani, *Il Grand Tour dei Cavalieri dell'Apocalisse*, *op. cit.* and ancillary publications. For plague losses in the Farnese duchy, see Casa (E.), «La peste bubbonica a Parma nell'anno 1630», *Archivio Storico per le Provincie Parmensi*, 1895, p. 55-146; Cirillo da Bagno, *I Cappuccini e la peste bubbonica negli anni 1629-1631*, Parma, 1912; Lasagni (R.), *Storia demografica della Città di Parma, dalle origine al 1860*, Parma, Tipo-lito Tecnografica, 1983; Romani (M.A.) «Aspetti della evoluzione demografica parmense nei secoli XVI e XVII», *Studi e Ricerche della Facoltà di Economia e Commercio dell'Università di Parma*, 7, 1970, p. 7-269; Tanzi (M.), *La dinamica della popolazione di Piacenza dalla metà del '500 alla peste di 1630*, Tesi di Laurea, Università di Parma, Facoltà di Economia, 1983-1984.