'The Sky in Place of the Nile': Climate, Religious Unrest and Scapegoating in Post-Tridentine Apulia

‘The Sky in Place of The Nile’: Climate, Religious Unrest and Scapegoating in Post-Tridentine Apulia

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how extremely adverse climatic and weather conditions in early modern southern Italy played a part in disrupting social coexistence among groups and individuals of different confessions and beliefs in what until then had been top-down sanctioned or tolerated multi-confessional communities. It focuses on the dramatic fate of the Waldensian colonies in Calabria and Apulia, and the little-studied case of witchcraft panic that broke out in the town of Bitonto in 1593. By examining different ways of dealing with environmental crises (rogatory processions, apocalyptic scapegoating, witchcraft panics), the article contributes to a history of intolerance from the ‘inside out’.

KEYWORDS

Apulia, Bitonto, witch-hunts, Waldensians, climate, migration

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As Monica Juneja and Gerrit Jasper Schenk note, catastrophic events in the premodern age could be viewed as a disruption of the ordered universe.[1] No less significantly, common, emotionally charged patterns of scapegoating emerged, a compensatory response that sought to restore a perceived sense of control by explaining a negative outcome in the environment – or an economic imbalance – that might otherwise seem incomprehensible or uncontrollable. New evidence recently presented by economic historians Robert Warren

1. M. Juneja and G.J. Schenk, ‘Viewing disasters: Myth, history, iconography and media across Europe and Asia’, in M. Juneja and G.J. Schenck (eds), *Disaster as Image: Iconographies and Media Strategies across Europe and Asia* (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner, 2014), pp. 14–22.

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Anderson, Noel D. Johnson and Mark Koyama shows how tolerance for minority groups in extractive societies invariably frayed when negative economic shocks occurred, leading to persecution and expulsions. They demonstrate that the relation between economic shocks and the persecution of Jews was weaker in stronger states and dropped off as markets became better integrated.[2] This article examines how, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Apulia, climate, geography, demography, settlement patterns and a predominantly rural economy provided the fundamental structures upon which the area's spiritual and emotional cultures were built. No attempt is made to implement a 'cliometric' data-driven approach; instead, by considering different ways of dealing with environmental crises (rogatory processions, apocalyptic scapegoating, witchcraft panics) in southern Italy and the emotive triggers associated with the land, the dusty soil and the region's topographical conditions, this article contributes to a history of intolerance from the 'inside out'.

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In an incisive essay, Alexandra Walsham argued that rather than situating disenchantment in a particular epoch, it was more fruitful to think 'in terms of cycles of desacralization and resacralization, disenchantment and re-enchantment, that would wax and wane over time'.[3] Take the powerful disbelief expressed by the Carolingian archbishop Agobard of Lyon at a form of weather magic that, he claimed, was being widely practised around the city in the early ninth century. According to Rob Means, Agobard may have been targeting local village sorcerers and his fellow clerics, who professed an ability to control the weather in return for some form of payment. Agobard's *Liber contra insulsam vulgi opinionem de grandine et tonitruis* was first published from a medieval manuscript in 1605.[4] Two years earlier, a cunning priest and one of the main characters of this article, Bishop Flaminio Parisi, died in Naples, far from his see in Bitonto, where long rainless winters and summers were the norm.[5]

2. R.W. Anderson, N.D. Johnson and M. Koyama, 'Jewish persecutions and weather shocks, 1100–1800', *Economic Journal* **127** (602) (2017): 924–58. See also N.D. Johnson and M. Koyama, *Persecution and Toleration: The Long Road to Religious Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Linda Williams, 'The Anthropocene and the long seventeenth century: 1550–750', in T. Bristow and T.H. Ford (eds), *A Cultural History of Climate Change* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 87–107.

3. A. Walsham, 'The Reformation and "the disenchantment of the world" reassessed', *Historical Journal* **51** (2008): 527.

4. See R. Means, 'Thunder over Lyon: Agobard, the *tempestarii* and Christianity', in C. Steel, J. Marenbon and W. Verbeke (eds), *Paganism in the Middle Ages: Threat and Fascination* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), pp. 157–66.

5. Cardinal-nephew Pietro Aldobrandini said of Parisi, perhaps with a degree of hyperbole, that he had been the only corrupt bishop in the healthy body of the Catholic episcopacy chosen by his uncle Clement VIII. See S. Tabacchi, 'Nomine vescovili e ruolo del Papa in un dibattito curiale di inizio Seicento', in C. Ossola, M. Verga and M.A. Visceglia (eds), *Religione, cultura e politica nell'Europa dell'età moderna* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), p. 272.

Bitonto, a suffragan diocese of Bari in Apulia, was subject to papal appointment. The considerable profitability of the bishop's assets, and the significant number of worshippers under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary, made it one of the most sought after in the Bari area. Almost all the produce consumed by the population was local: oil, almonds, wine, vegetables, grain and pulses. Linen and cotton were also produced, and attempts were made to produce silk. Peasant farmers did not live in the countryside – their sole source of subsistence and income – but returned to the town at sunset to a frugal meal generally consisting of fava beans, accompanied on rare occasions by bread. In the winter, beans alternated with cabbage tops. The majority of the active population worked in agriculture and, in a region with high temperatures and low rainfall, largely depended for their subsistence on the relative mildness of the climate.[6]

Severe drought caused shortages of feed and water for cattle, withered vegetable crops and stressed trees and vines. Though few people died of hunger, the consumption of inedible or rotten food sometimes caused illness, especially infectious diseases such as typhus.[7] Divine protection was sought against crop damage and pleas made for a harvest abundant enough to feed families. The customary minor rogations, a triduum of fasting and prayer before the feast of the Ascension, as laid down in the Catholic liturgical calendar, had a propitiatory function. Together with the apotropaic function that justified the inclusion of prayers of liberation from storms, earthquakes, illness, war and famine, the rogations were designed to support agrarian cycles and to ensure the fertility of the fields. On each of the three rogation mornings, processions headed by male confraternities followed by clergy and then by women and children wound their way along the boundaries of rural parishes or districts of the urban population, while the officiating priest chanted the Litany of the Saints. At preestablished points, the procession halted, the cleric raised the cross and, turning to the cardinal points, recited the invocations of the litanies: *A fulgure et tempestate / A flagello terraemotus / A peste, fame et bello* ('From lightning and storms / From the scourge of earthquake / From plague, famine and war') and so on, to which the rest of the assembly responded with *Libera nos Domine*. In Bitonto, from the seventeenth century until the final such penitential event on 30 July 1990, the statue of the 'Black Christ' from the church of Santa Teresa (formerly Santa Maria delle Grazie, or del Popolo) was carried in the procession, accompanied by the lachrymose invocation in the local vernacular, *Chrìste móje fa chiòuve* / *sénza làmbe e sénza tròune* (My Christ, let it rain without lightning and without thunder). In the collective imagination, the olive brown colour of the wooden sculpture (less marked since

6. V. Robles, 'Bitonto durante l'episcopato di Cornelio Musso (1544–1547)', *Studi Bitontini* **27–29** (1979): 11–28.

7. G. Alfani, 'The famine of the 1590s in northern Italy: An analysis of the greatest "system shock" of the sixteenth century', *Histoire et Mesure* **26** (2011): 38.

its twentieth-century restoration) evoked the colouring of the leaden sky when rain was imminent.[8]

Figure 1. *Cristo dell'Acqua* (the Black Christ of Bitonto), 16th century. Bitonto, Church of St Teresa. Detail from a photo by Francesco Paolo Cosola. Courtesy of Archivio Confraternita SS. Crocifisso, Bitonto.

8. C. Minenna, *Ritualità e Associazionismo: la chiesa di Santa Teresa e il Cristo dell'Acqua a Bitonto* (Bitetto: Tipolito Vitetum, 1997), pp. 13–29. Also see A. Benvenuti, 'Riti propiziatori e di espiazione', in M. Matheus, G. Piccinni, G. Pinto, and G.M. Varanini (eds), *Le calamità ambientali nel tardo medioevo europeo: realtà, percezioni, reazioni* (Florence: FUP, 2010), p. 84.

Documents held in the Vatican Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith tell the story of an Inquisitorial investigation prompted by one of these rituals. On 5 April 1660, Simeone Mele of Modugno, a Dominican friar from Bitonto's San Domenico convent, signed a testimony before the bishop of Bitonto, Alessandro Crescenzi (1607–1688). It referred to a brief but alarming conversation he had had two years earlier with a local acquaintance, Diego Barone, who was incarcerated shortly afterwards in the bishop's palace with his brother Carlo on charges of Judaism. One morning in May 1658, the friar took part in a procession with the statue of the Madonna della Misericordia to pray for her intercession so that 'from the goodness of Blessed God' the area might receive rain, 'of which there was extreme necessity'.[9] As he was returning to his convent after the procession, Simeone ran into Diego Barone who asked him where he had been. The friar told him about the procession, the intercessory prayer for rain (*ad petendam pluviam*) addressed to the 'Most Holy Mother' and his hope that the Virgin would grant it. Barone was amazed that Simeone could possibly think that it might rain because of the Madonna's intervention, as it was nothing other than 'Earth vapour'.[10] Shocked, the friar retired immediately to his cell. But two years later he felt the need to 'unburden his conscience' and tell the bishop what had happened, specifying that he had no personal animosity towards Barone and barely knew him, as he did not have much 'familiarity' (*intrinsechezza*) with him. He added that Barone had a reputation as a 'respected gentleman' and a 'jester', casting doubt on the truth of Barone's imprudent assertions.[11]

Similar doubts appear in the statement made to Bishop Crescenzi on 17 April 1660 by another eminent witness, Don Giuseppe Marziani, canon primicerius of the cathedral. Marziani affirmed that he had considered Barone 'a good man in the past, but a jester', but now wondered if that judgement was mistaken. He learned from his father Giovan Battista that the previous winter Diego Barone had uttered the following words: 'Who was this Jesus Christ [?] He was just an honest man'.[12] Thanks to these reports, suspicions grew that Diego Barone and his brother Carlo had succumbed to Judaizing influences.[13]

9. Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly known as the Holy Office of the Inquisition), Sant'Offizio, Stanza storica (hereafter ACDF/SO/StSt), BB3c, f. 558*r*. For more on the ties between the Barone brothers and the Vargas family in Naples, see P.H. Criado, 'Cristianos nuevos de origen ibérico en el Reino de Nápoles en el siglo XVII', *Sefarad* **72** (2) (2012): 351–387.

10. ACDF/SO/StSt, BB3c, f. 558*r*.

11. ACDF/SO/StSt, BB3c, f. 558*v*.

12. ACDF/SO/StSt, BB3c, f. 560*r*.

13. When repeatedly asked about any unusual food precautions taken by the Barone family, or any talk, practices or company incompatible with Catholic doctrine or in keeping with Jewish rites, a servant who had worked in the house of Diego Barone's family for 23 years, Venere de Tartaglia, attributed such insinuations to malevolent gossip. She provided an astute and detailed account of how, during a grape harvest, members of the Barone family met at their rural farmhouse in the hamlet of Torre Fabrizio and ate 'hams' and 'sausage' without

The Inquisitorial vicissitudes of the Barone brothers show how extreme climatic conditions and events frequently acted as triggers for the blaming and marginalization of individuals and groups, and even for horrific acts of religious violence.

An over-populated yet environmentally precarious area could give rise to a blend of positive and negative feelings even in those charged with pastoral duties, as shown in the first homily delivered in Bitonto's cathedral in December 1548 by the Piacentino-born Cornelio Musso (1511–1574), an eminent conciliar father appointed as Bishop of Bitonto by Pope Paul III in 1544. He implored God for support in providing pastoral care to the 'infinite multitude [that] is in this church'.[14] Less than a year later though, in October 1549, increasingly nostalgic for his former studies in Padua, Musso wrote to the cardinal of Urbino:

> I find myself in these final reaches of Italy, in this dustbowl (*seccagine*) of Apulia … and I have really done little [other than] keeping myself alive and healthy in this excessive heat … certainly just the memory of the pleasantness of my studies in Padua, in the Colli Euganei, with those river banks, those theatres, consoles me in these deserts … an arid Apulia where there is no spring, no river, no lake, no marsh, no well, indeed where it rains so rarely that the sky seems to be made of copper and the ground of iron.[15]

In the episcopacy of Giovanni Pietro Fortiguerra (1517–1592), who succeeded Musso in 1574, the bishopric was enriched by legacies, bequests, gifts and benefices. Fortiguerra's name is associated with the construction of a Marian chapel in the cathedral crypt in 1578, and the 1581 establishment of the archconfraternity Beatae Mariae Virgini Immaculatae Conceptionis, which preserves the Marian cult to this day.[16] Proclaimed the main patron of the city in 1703, in the inscription dedicated to her on the obelisk in Piazza Cattedrale in 1731, the Virgin Mary would have been recognized as 'solicitous in dispensing rain'.

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reserve: the meat they consumed was lamb dressed with 'pork lard'. ACDF/SO/StSt, BB3c, ff. 562–65.

14. Vatican Library, Ms Borg. Lat. (hereafter VL/Ms Borg. Lat.), letter of 7 October 1564, f. 224. In the original, the final sentence reads: *un'arida Puglia ove non è fonte, né fiume, né lago, né palude, né pozzo, anzi dove piove così di rado che pare il cielo sia di rame e la terra di ferro*. On Musso, see C.E. Norman, *Humanist Taste and Franciscan Values: Cornelio Musso and Catholic Preaching in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Lang, 1998).
15. VL/Ms Borg. Lat., f. 226. Wide-ranging documentary evidence about the weather in Western and Central Europe in the 1540s shows that the 1540 drought was probably more extreme and persistent (11 months) than similar events in the instrumental period; the cumulative annual deviation in the number of precipitation days was around 90 to 95 in comparison to the twentieth-century average. The climate in those years must have been even more intolerable in the south, as Bishop Musso's correspondence reveals. See O. Wetter et al., 'The year-long unprecedented European heat and drought of 1540 – a worst case', *Climatic Change* **125** (2014): 349–63.
16. S. Milillo, *Confraternite e associazioni laicali a Bitonto* (Modugno: Favia, 2013), pp. 147–48.

Marian devotion is also attested by the commissioning of an emblematic single-panel altarpiece (Madonna *Glykophilousa* and Saints) attributed to a painter of Spanish origin, Alonso (de) Corduba, active in Bitonto between 1594 and 1619.[17] The painting, on display in the town's diocesan museum, is dated 1603, and bears the episcopal crest of Flaminio Parisi, the beguiling bishop who died that very year in Naples, where he had gone 'for a change of air'.[18] In so doing, he left Bitonto in the grip of unpleasant weather and still tainted by his clumsy, criminal and emotionally disruptive handling of a series of cases of demonic possession. One of these involved the declarations of a young epileptic woman treated as a frenzied witch ('it happened at this time that a certain Laura Stella de' Paladini was possessed'),[19] while another involved Laura Antonia di Bitetto, a woman who 'said she saw the angels of each person around her'.[20] There were also other cases, women accused of wicked spells, who reported, either under torture or for a price, nocturnal gatherings (*giuochi*) of devils, witches and magicians.[21]

Born in the Cosentino area of Calabria, Flaminio Parisi (1563–1603) was the author of acclaimed legal works and an eminent professor of canonical law at the Roman College when, aged just thirty, he succeeded Fortiguerra as bishop of Bitonto. When he arrived in the diocese he found the capitular clergy in the throes of a conflict that his vicar, the ambitious archdeacon Ottavio Bove, had triggered with public exorcisms performed at the expense

17. See A. Castellano, 'Francesco Corduba, pittore e incisore a Roma', *Studi Bitontini* **12** (1974): 34–48; S. Milillo, 'Documenti inediti per la storia dell'arte in Puglia', *Studi Bitontini* **16/17** (1975): 44–63.

18. Archivio Apostolico Romano, Segr. Stato, 18, ff. 200–201 (Il Nunzio al Card. Pietro Aldobrandini, Naples, 8 April 1603). See V. Maulucci (ed.), *Nunziature di Napoli*, Vol. 4 (13 March 1592–9 December 1605) (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per l'Età Moderna e Contemporanea, 2008), p. 272. Also see S. Milillo, 'Il Capitolo della Cattedrale di Bitonto tra vescovi e Universitas', in *Cultura e società a Bitonto e in Puglia nell'età del Rinascimento* (Galatina: Congedo, 2009), p.161.

19. Vatican Library, Vat. Lat. (hereafter VL/Vat. Lat.) 6972, f. 1. The document containing the complaint made to the Holy Office regarding Parisi's conduct by a cleric from Bitonto, Ferrante Stellacci (or Stellaccio) is largely transcribed in the appendix to G. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Milan: Sansoni, 2003 [1990]), pp. 291–304. See also G. Romeo, 'Inquisitori domenicani e streghe in Italia tra la metà del Cinquecento e i primi decenni del Seicento', in C. Longo (ed.), *Praedicatores, Inquisitores*, III, *I Domenicani e l'Inquisizione romana* (Rome: Istituto storico domenicano, 2008), pp. 309–44; G. Romeo, 'Chiesa, Inquisizione e vita religiosa nella Puglia del tardo Cinquecento. Prospettive di ricerca', in S. Milillo (ed.), *Cultura e Società a Bitonto e in Puglia nell'età del Rinascimento* (Galatina: Congedo, 2009), pp. 104–06. See also R. Decker, *Witchcraft and the Papacy: An Account of the Formerly Secret Records of the Roman Inquisition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008 [2003]), pp. 108–11.

20. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, p. 301.

21. On this peculiar Italian version of the sabbath, known as the game (*gioco*), see T. Herzig, 'Witchcraft prosecutions in Italy', in B.P. Levack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 249–67.

of poor, infirm and illiterate women and aimed at socially and emotionally crushing anyone who hindered or even just mocked his ecclesiastical career aspirations. Laura Stella spoke of night-time assemblies of devils and of flying witches in the guise of animals, of ritual orgies, acts of necrophagy and the sacrificial murders of children. These events were reputedly attended for years, on Mondays and Thursdays, at the walnut tree of Benevento, by prominent figures in Bitonto (whom Laura and others 'named'). Among them were various prelates, though not the archdeacon's friends, who reportedly adhered to the diabolical pact (*la poliza*)[22] made by the possessed woman, so much so that 'the rumour spread that Bitonto was inhabited more by devils than by men'.[23] It was insinuated that one of the priests involved, Colangelo Ciotta, had 'wanted to seduce the son of a gentleman by giving him as many as five or six kinds of spells'.[24] The possessed ascribed the involvement of women to 'their credulity, fragility and inclination towards lasciviousness, things belonging to the female sex'.[25]

The apotropaic sound of bells in the event of weather phenomena (especially during storms) is widely known, and a topic of controversy throughout the Reformation. Also, common in contemporary demonological literature (Rémy, Grillandi, Guazzo) was the claim that demons dropped witches when the bells (often Angelus bells) rang at dawn. The Bitonto 'witches' related that if ever, when returning from the nocturnal gathering (*gioco*) 'by chance the bell rings at dawn, or soon after, when they are on the road, they are left by those who carried them [demons]'.[26] The assemblies concluded with the ritual recitation of three blasphemies ('that the Madonna was not virgin, but a prostitute, that Christ is not God, that the saints deny Christ').[27] In this we can discern an echo of Francesco Maria Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) and perhaps also the Jewish story of Jesus (*Toledot Yeshu*), which undoubtedly circulated in Italy among both Judaizers and 'heretics'.[28] Archdeacon Bove set up a trial to order the demons to rescind the diabolical pact. They proved so reluctant to return it that at a certain point 'the weather [from] being good, turned into a great storm with sudden thunder and lightning'.[29] In the protracted and horrifying

22. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL5h, f. 436*v*. See also ibid., ff. 416*r*, 417–419, 426*v*–427*r* ('each one enters into the pact with the demon, written in blood drawn from the right or left arm, or from the foot'), and Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, pp. 157, 296.
23. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, p. 295.
24. ACDF/SO/StSt , LL5h, f. 435*r*.
25. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL5h, f. 430*v*.
26. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL5h, f. 428*v*.
27. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL5h, f. 430*r*.
28. See D. Barbu, 'Emotions and the hidden transcript: The Jewish Gospel *Toledot Yeshu* in early modern Italy', *Cromohs* **24** (2021), in press.
29. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, p. 296. For an excellent introduction to the 'magical' world inhabited by Europeans from the early Middle Ages to the nineteenth century (with deeply insightful pages on weather, witchcraft, church bells being rung to stave off

interrogations (public confessions, nocturnal exorcisms, blandishments, beatings, torture and forced fasting lasting almost four months), a heavily pregnant woman, Laura di Fino, miscarried and fell seriously ill, while at least two suspects lost their lives after falling into wells that had dried up in the drought or into cisterns built to deal with it.[30]

Cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has noted that some rituals are designed to manage emotions (such as grief) as much as they are to create emotion in the participants.[31] Bishop Parisi, conscious that he was administering an area where medieval apotropaic rituals to protect the fields and the children who worked in them were very much alive, persuaded himself that he could take advantage of the festering climate of intimidation where illiterate and vulnerable women, with their alleged male accomplices, were accused of overriding the potency of Marian rogations by creating challenging environmental conditions.[32] He resorted to imprisonment, torture and harassment to extort undue benefits from the more affluent members of his flock, even staging the miraculous event of a crucifix supposedly oozing blood when profaned by the possessed.[33] The bishop was denounced, together with Bove, to the Congregation of the Holy Office in a meticulous report prepared by Ferrante Stellacci, the capitular priest who had been the first to conduct an exorcism on Laura Stella (possessed, he wrote, by a 'water demon' named Caronte who wanted to drown her in a well),[34] before he then realized the criminal mechanism he had involuntarily activated, and, following orders from the cardinal of S. Severina, went to Rome.[35] Together with a copy of the trial proceedings, extrajudicial depositions and a not disinterested request for authority to impose absolutions 'at least before the tribunal of conscience' (*in foro conscientiae*), as well as mild penitence for the possessed and other named persons, Parisi hurriedly procured for his seniors a defence statement dated 15 January 1594.[36] More than facts, this exposition contained doctrine (and repeated and supplemented the tendentious and pompous arguments of a *Discorso* compiled by

thunderstorms, and agrarian customs including rogation), see S. Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Hambledon Press, 2000).

30. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, pp. 295, 298, 302.
31. R. Rosaldo, 'Grief and a headhunter's rage: On the cultural force of emotions', in E. Bruner (ed.), *Text, Play and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society* (Washington, DC: American Ethnological Society, 1984), pp. 178–98.
32. The wealthy father of one of the detained women, Angelella de Mastro Cola di Gravina, commented when approached by various parties with the suggestion that he buy her liberation: 'They searched more for her purse than for [instances of] witchcraft'. See Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, p. 298.
33. Ibid., 158. See also Rome, Vallicelliana Library, Ms R45, ff. 40*r–v*.
34. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, p. 292.
35. Ibid., p. 158.
36. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL5h. I intend to publish a full transcription elsewhere in the near future.

Bove for the benefit of the Roman cardinals, and which seemed to Stellacci to be a 'work more erudite than real').[37]

In his statement, Bishop Parisi tied in each of the supposed demoniacal manifestations displayed or reported by the detained women to the most convenient demonological arguments with which he was familiar. He piled up citations from leading demonologies and demonologists, including the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the *Speculum Maius* of Vincent de Beauvais, the *Apollonius Tyaneus* of Philostratus, Antonio Ghislandi, Silvestro Mazzolini, Bartolomeo Spina, Jean Bodin, Bernardo da Como, Alfonso de Castro, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Arnaldo Albertini, Pelbartus de Temesvár, Casiodoro de Reina, Johannes Trithemius and others. But the Holy Office was not convinced and sent one of its consultors, the doctor of law Giulio Monterenzi, to Bitonto. He succeeded in having the case transferred to Rome, and arranged for some of the people, including at least two pregnant women, charged with magical-diabolical crimes to be taken there for questioning.[38]

The case, followed closely by Pope Clement VIII himself, ended with the acquittal of the accused, and the commutation of the charges against the possessed to perjury, superstition and slander (carnal intercourse with demons having been excluded after the virginity of the accused was confirmed). Severe measures were instead taken against the bishop and archdeacon. Both were expelled from Bitonto and prohibited from ever serving as judges in ecclesiastical trials, together with a ban, for the archdeacon alone, on conducting exorcisms and hearing confession.[39] Having regained his freedom, following requests by Roman prelates and the local clergy, Parisi was reinstated in the diocese after three years.[40] This final period of his episcopacy was dominated by plans, never realized, to build an aqueduct to supply the city with water and the consecration of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie (or del Popolo), erected with the alms of the faithful (*ex elemosinis fidelium*) in 1601.[41] It was near this church that a large public cistern (*pescara*) was built in 1612, designed to mitigate the impact of recurrent drought when the Marian rogations did not suffice.[42]

37. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, pp. 157, 295.
38. VL/Vat. Lat. 6972; Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, pp. 158–59.
39. Decker, *Witchcraft and the Papacy*, pp. 110–11.
40. ACDF/SO/StSt, LL3e, ff. 748–760; Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decreta Santi Officii (hereafter ACDF/DSO), 1594, f. 372*r*; ACDF/DSO, 1595, fols 85*r*, 214*r*, 221*r*; ACDF/DSO, 043 (1601), 38 (10 and 11).
41. S. Milillo, *I vescovi a Bitonto* (Fasano: Schena Editore, 2019), p. 191.
42. Minenna, *Ritualità e Associazionismo*, pp. 17–19.

Figure 2. Alonso (de) Corduba (attr.), *Madonna Glykophilousa and Saints*, c1603. Photo by Italo Maggio. Courtesy of Museo Diocesano di Bitonto 'Mons. Aurelio Marena'.

A recent and close rereading by Michele Ruggiero of Corduba's altarpiece, highlighting the Roman Church's ambition to confessionally funnel the collective emotional response to extreme environmental conditions, identifies the saints flanking the Virgin and Child as Vicente Ferrer, a Spanish member of the Order of Preachers, and Bishop Donato of Arezzo. Ferrer was extremely diligent in legitimating the forced conversion of Jews – even though, according

to Jacques Basnage, he was of Jewish descent himself.[43] Ferrer was canonized in 1455 and widely venerated as a thaumaturgical saint, especially in southern Italy, where farmers still invoke his intercession in times of drought. In the painting he is portrayed with a book open at a page bearing a severe warning to fear vice (*timete vitium*). Donato, on the other hand, is delicately holding a diaphanous boat-shaped moon, a metaphor of various altered psychic states, but also of the epileptic condition that afflicted Laura Stella de' Paladini and which was widely associated in peasant culture with astral or demoniacal influences. The cult of the bishop saint from Arezzo, martyred under Julian the Apostate in 362, was, and is, very widespread in southern Italy: he is still today attributed with thaumaturgical powers in treating epileptic fits.[44] A church was dedicated to him in Bitonto, though it was later demolished in 1770. Parisi's dishonourable episcopacy appears to have ended, then, with him leaving behind this altarpiece, which he commissioned as an everlasting memory, a kind of *ex-voto suscepto*, perhaps in thanks for having been reinstated as bishop, or to make amends for his pastoral shortcomings, deceptive emotional tactics and moral dissipation, and for having corroborated, out of greed, peasant superstitions which held that forces of nature could be controlled by magicians thought to have power over storms (*tempestarii*).

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Important reasons for migratory flows in early modern Europe included confessional solidarity, Christian charity towards non-Christian groups (Sephardic Jews, for instance, were welcomed in large numbers in the Calvinist Low Countries), and family, linguistic and national and affective networks that channelled flows of people towards locations where similar and sympathetic communities already existed. However, the primary reason why governments facilitated the arrival and integration of exiles was economic opportunism. Their aim was to repopulate abandoned settlements, or establish new ones in areas where, due to soil and climatic conditions, particular skills and manual labour were required to reclaim and make them profitable, to offset the influence of other confessional groups or to boost fiscal income or draw on specific professional, intellectual or entrepreneurial skills that exiles possessed. Religious refugees (*religionis causa*) often turned into indispensable migrants.[45]

The concrete practice of plurality, the inevitable social intermingling between groups from different confessions or religions, and everyday forms of dissimulation, often created groundswells of tolerance. As Walsham notes,

43. J. Basnage, *Histoire des Juifs* (The Hague: Henri Scheurleer, 1716), tome IX, part II, chap. xxiv, p. 701.

44. G. Lützenkirchen, 'Il culto di San Donato di Arezzo nell'Italia centro-meridionale', *Atti e memorie della Accademia Petrarca di Lettere, Arti e Scienze* **70** (1990): 33–47.

45. See S. Lachenicht, 'Refugees and refugee protection in the early modern period', *Journal of Refugee Studies* **30** (2) (2017): 261–81.

feelings such as enmity, amity, prejudice and benevolence long coexisted in early modern society, forming a 'cyclical rather than linear' relationship.[46] Periodic outbreaks of prejudice and violence acted as vents for individuals to appease the guilt they felt about associating with people who wilfully affirmed a 'false' creed. It was not uncommon for these kinds of dramatic disruptions of social coexistence among groups and individuals with different confessional beliefs to be triggered by severe weather fluctuations.

In Apulia, in south-eastern Italy, the need to repopulate rural areas characterized by karst morphology and insufficient rainfall generally favoured the settlement of foreign or non-Catholic communities. They were willing to till, irrigate and cultivate land in exchange for a lenient enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy. The Greek-Albanian diaspora, for example, arrived in the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily between the fifteenth and sixteenth century, first from Epirus and Albania, then from the Aegean and Peloponnese, following the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. Having been granted hospitality in exchange for services rendered to sovereigns and their feudatories, the Albanian communities were slowly assimilated, and they switched almost entirely from the Greek Orthodox to the Latin rite.[47]

Equal consideration should be given to the internal migration of Occitan-speaking Waldensians from the Alpine valleys to certain remote, and therefore hopefully more secure areas of Calabria and Apulia. Besides the need to escape recurrent religious harassment and persecution, seventeenth-century sources suggest that this Waldensian migration was driven by overpopulation of the Piedmontese valleys – essentially a socio-economic crisis – and the need to find fertile land to cultivate: Waldensians from Val Chisone and Val Pellice, from Provence and the Dauphiné accepted the invitation of feudatory lords in the province of Cosenza (in Calabria) between 1330 and 1400, branching out at the same time, or soon after, into Apulia. It is significant that during the fifteenth century there was a yearning among the Alpine Waldensians for a 'Waldensian region' generically known as Pulha, depicted as a 'land of hope'.[48]

The Waldensians were discreet, did not proselytize, practised endogamy (leading 'Calabrian Waldensians' to marry within their group) and used the Occitan language for their own activities. As a result, they lived undisturbed

46. A. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 231.

47. This involved attempts at conciliation and compromise in the liturgy, accepted by popes as a price worth paying to have the Orthodox community under the authority of the Church of Rome. See V. Giura, *Storie di minoranze: Ebrei, Greci, Albanesi nel Regno di Napoli* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987); L. De Rosa, 'The Balkan minorities (Slavs and Albanians) in south Italy', *Journal of European Economic History* **36** (2007): 445–56; P. Militello, *Storie mediterranee: destini di uomini e cose tra XV e XIX secolo* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 21–38.

48. M. Fratini, 'Per una geografia del valdismo mediteranneo', in A. Tortora (ed.), *Valdesi nel Mediterranneo tra medioevo e prima età moderna* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), p. 30.

throughout the Angevin and Aragonese period. Periodically they received visits from spiritual guides (*barba*), who dressed as merchants and travelled the length of the peninsula from Piedmont to the southern communities, enabling the latter to maintain contact with their communities of origin. Participation in Catholic rites warded off hostility from the wider community, and they were socially accepted. Commonly described as *Ultramontani* or *Provenzani* or *Piamontesi*, in other words as ethnically diverse, they were not stigmatized as heretics until they abandoned their customary Nicodemite practices and formally joined the Protestant Reformation; at most they were confused with the Albanians or 'new Christians' (converted Jews).[49]

The Waldensian colonists in Apulia, first allocated to the parched lands of the Tavoliere, soon moved to settle in small villages on the sub-Apennine slopes (Motta, Faeto, Celle San Vito, Castelluccio, San Marco dei Cavoti), where the climatic and environmental conditions were more favourable and more similar to those of their land.[50] This vast and inaccessible area was similarly characterized by the fragility of ecclesiastical structures, which alleviated the sense of vulnerability that always grips migrants and fugitives. Their well-being and tranquillity were ensured above all by the feudatories – not uncommonly at odds with the native population – until Spanish rule succeeded that of the Aragonese in 1504.

The Waldensians' contribution to the local economy even received statutory recognition. The statute regulating the conditions of their settlement in Volturara, on the Adriatic side of the Capitanata (the northern part of the Apulia region), permitted them to live 'according to their customs and habits' (*secundu lloro usu et consuetudine*) and to continue to 'go out at night'

49. A. Tortora, 'La guerra di Spagna contro i valdesi della prima età moderna (1559–1563): Narrazioni e rappresentazione di una 'guerra giusta'', *Magallánica: Revista de Historia Moderna* **5** (10) (2019): 113. Initially, the Waldensians devoted themselves to agriculture, cattle and sheep breeding, activities which, according to seventeenth-century Waldensian historians, were one of the main reasons they left the Piedmont valleys for the fertile lands of Calabria, with a climate suited to cultivating olives, vines, citrus fruits, chestnuts, figs and mulberry trees. Over time, a certain differentiation and social stratification probably emerged, with the economy branching out into activities that were also traditional forms of livelihood for Jewish communities scattered around the region: wool manufacturing, silk production, tanning and leatherworking. See E. Stancati, *Gli ultramontani: Storia dei Valdesi di Calabria* (Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 2008 [1984]); A. Perrotta, 'La documentazione sui Valdesi di San Sisto', in A. Tortora (ed.), *Valdesi nel Mediterranneo tra medioevo e prima età moderna* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), pp.129–42; C. Di Cave, 'Valdesi, ebrei e neofiti in Calabria nel XVI secolo', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* **80** (1) (2014): 19–34; V. Tedesco, 'Le comunità valdesi in Calabria dall'insediamento alla repressione del 1561: *Status quaestionis* e prospettive di ricerca', *Rogerius* **17** (2) (2014): 45–58; M. Fratini, '"*En Calabre, Apouille, et lieux circonvoisins, quasi à l'extremité de l'Italie vers l'Orient*": L'emigrazione valdese nell'Italia meridionale fra medioevo e prima età moderna', in R. Genre and P. Pazé (eds), *Le migrazioni dalle valli in età moderna* (Perosa, Argentina: LAR Editore, 2018), pp. 67–100.

50. F. Barra, 'Note sugli insediamenti valdesi del sub-appenino dauno-irpino', in A. Tortora (ed.), *Valdesi nel Mediterranneo tra medioevo e prima età moderna* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), p. 80.

(*andare de note fore*),[51] as the Waldensians habitually worshipped in the nocturnal hours, having become accustomed over the centuries to clandestine practices and dissimulation – the reason why they were sometimes associated and confused with witches in the fifteenth century.[52] Writing in the early seventeenth century, the Waldensian pastor Jean Paul Perrin recalled how 'the Lords of those places' had pressed the curates 'not to complain about those people, who after all were so respectable and had made not only the area, but also the priests rich: the tithes received from the abundance of fruit trees on previously unprofitable land were such that an eye could be closed to other things'. At least until the first half of the sixteenth century, this was critical 'in restraining all those who hated them'.[53] Then, gradually, over a period of fifty years, the Spanish Crown made life increasingly difficult for the non-native communities in the Kingdom of Naples, creating a climate of hostility fuelled by the Church of Rome's crackdown on heresies. This was also used as a pretext for other ends. One was to benefit Spanish manufacturers by curbing the preeminent role played by the Jews and, to a lesser degree, other communities, in silk production. And it was also used to contain social tensions stemming from the serious socio-economic, spiritual and political crisis at the end of the sixteenth century, accentuated by recurrent climate emergencies, by cunningly directing resentment towards these non-native communities.[54] The barons, who had previously defended the prerogatives and privileges of the Waldensians, now found themselves caught between the Spanish Crown and the Church of Rome. No longer having the power to defend them, they abandoned the Waldensian communities to their fate.

How many people died in the crusade against the Calabrian Waldensians in the hot summer of 1561 at San Sisto, La Guardia and Montalto, and later in Cosenza, is unclear, but the number probably exceeded a thousand.[55] 'It will not be sufficient remedy to take ten of them and vanquish them; they all need to be burnt', the archiepiscopal vicar of Naples, Giulio Pavesi (1510–1571), had written two years earlier in a letter to Michele Ghislieri, who presided over the Congregation of the Holy Office.[56] An eyewitness reported how the viceroy's

51. Quoted in Barra, 'Note sugli insediamenti valdesi', 84.
52. See C. Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 59–65.
53. Quoted in R. Ciaccio, 'Famiglie e patrimoni dei calabro-valdesi', in A. Tortora (ed.), *Valdesi nel Mediterranneo tra medioevo e prima età moderna* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), p. 116.
54. Heretics were seen as having a propensity for rebellion. Some of the key players in the events concerning charges of witchcraft in the Bitonto area who were taken to Naples in chains before being moved to Rome were said to have shared cells with fellow conspirators of Fra' Tommaso Campanella, who had wanted to establish an ideal communistic and theocratic republic in Calabria.
55. S. Peyronel Rambaldi and M. Fratini, *1561: I valdesi tra resistenza e sterminio in Piemonte e in Calabria* (Turin: Claudiana, 2011); P. Scaramella, *L'Inquisizione romana e i Valdesi di Calabria* (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 1999).
56. Quoted in Peyronel Rambaldi and Fratini, *1561*, pp.47–48.

troops meted out 'horrendous justice on those Lutherans', reserving for them the 'death of steers'. Locked up together in a house, the executioner made them kneel one by one, blindfolded them and then slit their throats: 'the elderly went to die cheerfully, and the young went with greater fear'.[57] A Catholic author, the Neapolitan Tommaso Costo, would also comment on these events, censuring the apparent composure of fathers at the sight of their children's brutal death.[58] After the massacre, entire family groups took refuge in Apulia, Sicily, the Piedmontese valleys and Geneva.

The subjugation initiated in Apulia by the Dominican Valerio Malvicino, the vicar of the archdiocese of Cosenza, who ordered that the Waldensians who had sought refuge there should be taken to Roman prisons of the Inquisition, was followed by the 'bloodless repression' coordinated, in two successive missions, by the Jesuit Cristoforo Rodríguez, who boasted of unmasking the heretics and reconducting them to the Roman faith 'using great gentleness'. He then interceded so that, with absolution, they received mild punishments and were not required to wear either the pitiful little yellow robe (the *abitello*) or to serve the punishment envisaged by *carcere perpetuo* (not confinement in the strict sense, but a kind of probation); such a limitation on their freedom would have damaged the economic interests of the former Waldensians, prevalently engaged in agriculture (and therefore also the collectors of tithes and taxes). Moreover, while the adults were out in the fields, the Jesuits could catechize their children. In a letter dated 6 December 1564, Rodriguez informed Cardinal Ghislieri at the Congregation of the Holy Office that the number of converted *provenzali* had reached around 440, which, combined with those from the previous mission, made around 1,500 in total.[59]

The forced conversions did not mean that all families and communities received the same treatment. The most well-off among them managed to avoid trial, abjuration and the expropriation of assets, or succeeded in getting them returned. In truth, even the Cuneese preacher Gian Luigi Pascale, who, after being sent by Calvin in 1560 to preach to the Waldensian communities of southern Italy, had fallen into the Inquisition's net and was burnt to death in a public execution in Rome, had expressed consternation at the hypocrisy of those brothers who, in cahoots with the feudatories, had adapted

57. Quoted in A. Tortora, 'Eretici ed eresia in Calabria nel '500', in A. Placanica (ed.), *Storia della Calabria moderna e contemporanea* (Rome: Gangemi, 2005), p. 477.

58. G. Tarantino, 'Mapping religion (and emotions) in the protestant valleys of Piedmont', *Asdiwal* **9** (2014): 96. In this essay I show how features of the Alpine landscape and its cartographic representation became symbols of Waldensian resistance and fortitude. See also A. Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

59. M. Scaduto, 'Tra inquisitori e riformati, le missioni dei Gesuiti tra i valdesi della Calabria e della Puglia', *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* **16** (1946): 8–13; M. Scaduto, 'Cristoforo Rodriguez tra i valdesi della Capitanata e dell'Irpinia', *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* **35** (1966): 3–77.

to 'idolatrizing' (that is, converting to Catholicism) and to 'conspiring against God'. Nothing remained to him but the hope that 'those who have had greater blessings from God will seek to persevere in improving every day'. But, as Renata Ciaccio has shown, it was the most well-off Waldensians – those enjoying greater protection from the secular authorities, and who had steered a successful course between the shifting equilibriums of the climate, the economy and power – who were the first to abandon their original beliefs, in a slow process of mimesis that led to their assimilation within the neighbouring Catholic population, all indistinct beneath the fiery sun of southern Italy.[60]

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In Bitonto, Bishop Parisi was succeeded by the more worthy Girolamo (Bernardino) Pallantieri (1533–1619), a Conventual Franciscan who had been an eminent theologian at the Studia of Pavia and Padua, and then by Giovanni Battista Stella (1561–1621), *presbiter romanus et referendarius utriusque signaturae*.

As a plaque erected in his honour by the chapter of Bitonto in the courtyard of the bishop's palace reads, Pallantieri 'was sought after by supreme pontiffs and by cardinals as an excellent preacher during Holy Masses, first by Saint Charles Borromeo and then by the cardinal of Montalto, who later became Pope Sixtus V. A staunch defender of the Catholic religion, he was frequently summoned to Rome by Clement VIII to deal with important controversies regarding matters of faith'. Even during his lifetime he was accredited with thaumaturgical powers, and was loved and venerated by the people for the saintliness of his manner and his pastoral zeal. He died in Bitonto on 25 August 1619, aged eighty-six, and was buried in the crypt of the imposing Romanesque-Norman cathedral, the restoration of which he had contributed to significantly. An examination of his mortal remains, performed by Bishop Fabrizio Carafa in 1639, found the corpse intact. A second one was carried out in 1682 by Bishop Francesco Antonio Galli, in the presence of the vicar general Giovanni Battista Morea, who reported that before commencing the exhumation, a request was made for a sign of the venerated bishop's powers of intercession – 'the gift of rain', of which there was once again extreme need. The response was immediate: a heavy rain shower started while the litanies were being recited.[61]

Having held top positions in the Signatura Iustitiae and the Signatura Gratiae, Giovanni Battista Stella had been diligent in administering papal justice. From an ancient line of aristocrats with Brescian origins, he was born in Rome and from an early age studied rhetoric at the Collegio Romano, together

60. Ciaccio, 'Famiglie e patrimoni', 115–23.
61. G. Minardi, 'Il linguaggio secentesco dei fatti prodigiosi operati da monsignor Pallanterio fra scienza, religione e magia a Bitonto', *Studi Bitontini* **30/31** (1980): 218–26.

with his better-known younger brother Giulio Cesare.[62] The Stella brothers led closely interconnected lives, and both were sought after in refined literary circles. For his consecration as bishop of Bitonto in 1619, Stella composed a poem of 270 lines in elegiac couplets. Infused with intense emotive engagement, it was published in Viterbo in 1620, unbeknown to the author, at the initiative of his brother Giulio Cesare.[63] The publication was backed by Cardinal Barberini, who believed poetic texts (*versibus apte inserantur*) played a useful role in holy rites and ceremonies as they encouraged interiorisation, and thought bishops were in urgent need of adequate rhetorical training.[64]

Bishop Stella prepared for his new office, conscious of just how vivid the memories of the scandalous iniquities of Bishop Parisi must still have been in his flock:

> Can I be equal to the office:
> whether I must stand guard to keep the sheepfold clean
> so no filth remains hidden where the sheep tread;
> the syphilis of the mind which induces evil does not tempt the feeble masters,
> and the industriousness due from them does not give way to consuming idleness;
> whether I must impose the new regulations decided by the Council
> and designed to heal the weakened flock from illness.[65]

Stella's detailed description of the area's peculiar hydrogeological features are telling: karst morphology, climatic inclemency, prolonged periods with no rain, arid land and rocks that do not produce sediment or detritus to fill the watercourses or limit their erosive force, and the permeability of the terrain. As a result, most of the precious rainfall ('the sky in place of the Nile') is absorbed, gathering in water-bearing strata deep underground and leading to an almost total absence of surface watercourses.

> Close by the waves of the Adriatic Sea bathe [Bitonto],
> calm as they come in onto the rocks, as they are good for transporting goods.
> And then trees which, in their variety, produce fruits without parsimony,
> indeed, in abundance; and fields opulent with harvests.
> And though *thirsty* Peucetia is without limpid waters,[66]

62. Giulio Cesare Stella was the author of the *Columbeidos libri priores duo*, the unfinished epic Virgilian poem about Christopher Columbus, celebrated as the new Aeneas. See C. Kallendorf, 'Aeneas in the "New World": Stella's Columbeis and Virgilian Pessimism', in *The Virgilian Tradition: Book History and the History of Reading in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1–10.
63. G. Battista Stella, *In suam ad episcopatum Bitunti consecrationem* (Viterbo: typis Discipulorum, 1620). For this essay, I benefited from the selective Italian translation of Stella's *Elegia* and the enlightening insights offered by Michele Ruggiero. See M. Ruggiero, 'Giovanni Battista Stella, il poeta vescovo (1561–1621)', *Studi Bitontini* **101/102** (2016): 241–73.
64. Stella, *In suam ad episcopatum Bitunti consecrationem*, 'Comes Iulius Caesar Stella lectori'.
65. Stella, *In suam ad episcopatum Bitunti consecrationem*, vv. 21–26.
66. Peucezia (Lat. *Peucetia*), the ancient name for the area near Bari.

and its sun-parched land lacks water-bearing strata,
and it is not bathed by the river [Nile] which, murky, irrigates in the summer alone
along its course the fertile soil of Canopus.
In truth, making up for the [hydrological] limits is Aether, who descends into the open womb
of his spouse Earth to fecundate her in the form of widespread rain.
The sky in place of the Nile; in place of springs, the clouds
pour water in the form of rain to revive the people.
The excavated earth gathers rainwater in cavernous wells
from where it banishes thirst for the fields and urban settlements;
and while the courses of shared rivers give to other populations water for their animals,
you are slaked by rainwater collected in wells,
which is neither muddied by animals with their hooves, nor contaminated with their mouths,
not even the viper with his slender body immerses into it.[67]

Though not pretending that he had come to the paradisiacal Arcadia of his poetry, Bishop Stella expressed fulsome praise for his flock's industriousness in building a network of wells to harvest and retrieve rainwater hygienically. The reference to the formation and action of clouds seems to anticipate the observation about 'water vapours' that would lead the unwary Diego Barone to be accused of Judaism a few years later, due to an irrepressible circularity between high and low culture not infrequently found when studying inquisitorial documents. Most significantly, Stella's couplets seem to suggest that pastoral commitment, in a land that can change in a flash from a mother prodigious with fruit into a divisive stepmother, cannot be limited to apotropaic *rituals* but must foster non-antagonistic sentiments and an industrious willingness to build a cohesive and virtuous community:

I must, then, sustain the Church of Bitonto, which requires a charisma of external provenance,
A unique city, but in its uniqueness, great;
A city rich in resources, famous for its minds, the generator of strong heroes in war,
Great in the aspiration for peace and no less generous in compassion.[68]

Stella's episcopacy was openly inspired by the Tridentine constitutions (*Concilio … coacto*). The brevity of his office – just over a year (*ut stella volans vix carae apparuit Urbi)* – combined with local opposition, prevented him from taking effective action. But significantly he had plans to replace the ambo with a wooden pulpit to bring ecclesiastical communication and the cathedral's layout into line with Tridentine decrees. This would have encouraged

67. Stella, *In suam ad episcopatum Bitunti consecrationem*, vv. 223–36 (emphasis added).
68. Stella, *In suam ad episcopatum Bitunti consecrationem*, vv. 215–18.

greater emotional and imaginative engagement by the congregation and may have offset the tendency, when facing severe weather or climate phenomena, to choose convenient scapegoats – such as secret Jews, supposed possessed demoniacs or even heretics.

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The most serious famines in the sixteenth century, as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie demonstrates in his classic study of the history of climate, were probably the result of extreme short-term fluctuations in climate.[69] The crisis peaked in Italy in 1591/2, when the birth rate hit a new low. Serious crises in subsistence farming left people with little option but to migrate, mostly to towns and cities, even though the authorities there routinely expelled 'useless mouths' – non-citizens, beggars, unemployed foreigners, students and even those with jobs but no special skills. As a result, contagious diseases often spread from towns into the countryside. The rise in mortality was partly due to harvest failures and depleted resources, but also to inadequate state- and community-run networks of assistance and solidarity. Spiralling violence fuelled by suspicion and envy, the presence of brigands and vagabonds on the edges of communities and the construction of threatening Others only made matters worse. The situation improved after 1594, when population growth picked up again, and the most evident signs of the havoc caused by starvation and disease were swiftly ameliorated. But the social and economic effects of the famine were longer lasting.[70] Violence, robbery, murder and malicious prosecution (not dissimilar to the emotional and social 'toxins' produced by a pandemic) hampered efforts to address shortcomings in traditional solidarity and mutual aid networks.[71] Bitonto's witchcraft panic, in which supposedly possessed women were forced to recount their participation in a witches' Sabbath, leading to the arrest, torture and subsequent death of their presumed accomplices, or the tragic fate of the Waldensian colonies in Calabria and Apulia, show the tragically disruptive effects of periodic outbreaks of prejudice and violence in early modern societies. Often sparked by marked fluctuations in the weather, they frayed affective ties and curbed social coexistence among groups and individuals who held different confessional beliefs and had different understandings of natural phenomena, in what until then had been multi-confessional communities sanctioned or tolerated from the top down.

69. E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate Since the Year 1000* (New York: Noonday Press, 1971).

70. Alfani, 'The famine of the 1590s in northern Italy', 23, 25, 40, 43–44 and *passim*.

71. S.K. Cohn, *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). In this fascinating investigation of thousands of descriptions of epidemics throughout history, Cohn shows that epidemic diseases have generally unified societies, spurring self-sacrifice and compassion.

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