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Approaches to Seasonality in Premodern Italy

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Article abstract

In this article, two historians of medieval and early modern Italy explore the impact of seasonal rhythms and routines on the social structures and practices of rural communities in central and northern Italy between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. We also investigate how rural inhabitants and those with authority over them responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by seasonal change. Primary sources include episcopal visitations, the diary of a rural priest, statutes from rural communities, testimony before episcopal courts, chronicles, and the records of magistracies in mountain communities. Studying the relationship between seasonality, sociability, and power relations in rural communities challenges one-dimensional narratives of premodern “peasant” life and instead demonstrates the complex and fluid nature of rural society.

Approaches to Seasonality in Premodern Italy

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In this article, two historians of medieval and early modern Italy explore the impact of seasonal rhythms and routines on the social structures and practices of rural communities in central and northern Italy between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. We also investigate how rural inhabitants and those with authority over them responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by seasonal change. Primary sources include episcopal visitations, the diary of a rural priest, statutes from rural communities, testimony before episcopal courts, chronicles, and the records of magistracies in mountain communities. Studying the relationship between seasonality, sociability, and power relations in rural communities challenges one-dimensional narratives of premodern “peasant” life and instead demonstrates the complex and fluid nature of rural society.

Dans cet article, deux historiennes de l'Italie médiévale et renaissance explorent l'impact des rythmes saisonniers et des occupations qui les caractérisent sur les structures et les pratiques sociales des communautés rurales du centre et du nord de l'Italie entre le XIV^e et le XVII^e siècles. Nous nous intéressons également à la façon dont les habitants des campagnes et les personnes ayant autorité sur eux ont réagi aux défis et aux nouvelles possibilités apportés par les changements saisonniers. Nos sources primaires comprennent des visites épiscopales, le journal d'un prêtre de campagne, des lois alors en vigueur dans des communautés rurales, des témoignages effectués devant des tribunaux épiscopaux, des chroniques, ainsi que des registres de magistrats œuvrant dans des communautés vivant dans les montagnes. L'étude de la relation entre saisonnalité, sociabilité et relations de pouvoir dans les communautés rurales remet en question les récits unidimensionnels de la vie « paysanne » prémoderne et révèle, au contraire, la nature complexe et fluide de la société rurale.

In this article we present a preliminary analysis of the ways in which seasonal rhythms and routines impacted the social structures and practices of rural communities in central and northern Italy between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.* In particular, we explore how rural inhabitants and those

* All translations in the work are the authors' own. Roisin Cossar would like to acknowledge funding support from the University of Manitoba and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

with authority over them responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by seasonal change. Studying the relationship between seasonality, sociability, and power relations in rural communities challenges one-dimensional narratives of premodern “peasant” life and instead demonstrates the complex and fluid nature of rural society. It is our hope that the events, sources, and approaches we present here can provide a stepping-stone for future studies that integrate the social, economic, and religious history of the premodern era with the history of the environment in that period.

During the twentieth century, scholarship on medieval and early modern Europe tended to separate the study of the environment from that of human activity. In particular, social historians rarely viewed the environment as a historical phenomenon, tending instead to treat it as a backdrop for human activity.¹ As the subdiscipline of environmental history took shape in the late twentieth century, early modern scholars came to focus on environmental topics more quickly than their medievalist counterparts.² Seasonality, a subtheme of environmental history, became a focus for some early work in early modern studies, with topics such as religious ritual, marriage, and death all given a seasonal treatment.³ In this article we counter the tendency of this

1. The early work of Fernand Braudel on the Mediterranean provided a model for understanding “geographic time” and “human time” separately. See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

2. See, for instance, John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), [dx.doi.org/10.1525/9780520939356](https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520939356). Recent works in early modern studies that engage with the history of health and disease also take the environment into account; see Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For an overview of recent developments in the field of environmental history from a medieval perspective, see Richard Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), [dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139050937](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139050937). Some medieval literature scholars have examined seasonality as a theme: see P. S. Langeslag, *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015). One early exception to medieval historians’ tendency to disregard the seasons as a subject of historical inquiry can be found in the work of LeRoy Dresbeck, a historian of technology who, before his premature death in the late 1970s, studied the development of heating technologies to cope with winter weather during the Middle Ages: LeRoy Dresbeck, “*Techne, Labor et Natura: Ideas and Active Life in the Medieval Winter*,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* (1979): 81–119.

3. See, for instance, Robert Scribner, “Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial German Society,” *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1987): 1–16; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700*

new environmental scholarship to focus on the post-1500 era, and we instead draw together medieval and early modern evidence to argue that seasonal rhythms marked contexts as distinct as churches and criminal courts over a long period. Our sources suggest that sociability and social structures within rural communities varied according to the seasons, as did the ways in which ecclesiastical and territorial powers exercised strategies of control. Our portrayal of the seasonal dimension of premodern rural society is not static, however. We trace changes as well as continuities across this period, demonstrating, for instance, that developing strategies of record-keeping and archiving from the late fifteenth century expand and deepen the possibilities open to researchers working in this field.

Our exploration of the meaning of seasonality within rural life draws on sources created by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities in central and northern Italy, particularly those based in the regions of Pistoia, Prato, Florence, and Ferrara, as well as farther to the north in Como. We chose these sites in part because of the survival of evidence within their archives, but also because their terrain ranged considerably, encompassing both flat land and high mountains. The diocese of Ferrara, for instance, was almost completely contained within the flood plain of the Po river, while in the Pistoian mountains, altitudes were generally so high that the cultivation of wheat crops or vines was impossible and chestnuts constituted a major part of the diet of inhabitants. The agricultural poverty of mountain communities also meant that they were heavily dependent on labour mobility, particularly transhumance as a result of the extremely cold

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), [dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203636.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203636.001.0001), and Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David Cressy, "The Seasonality of Marriage in Old and New England," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16.1 (1985): 1–21, [dx.doi.org/10.2307/204319](https://doi.org/10.2307/204319); John Landers and Anastasia Mouzas, "Burial Seasonality and Causes of Death in London 1670–1819," *Population Studies* 42.1 (2010): 59–83, [dx.doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000143126](https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000143126). In addition, scholars of crime have a long history of searching for patterns in crime and the relationship between these crimes and environmental factors. Some of the earliest scholars of criminology observed a correlation between the prevalence of particular types of crime and their seasonal frequency. Cesare Lombroso, for instance, used data on crime and political violence from all across Europe to map violent uprisings over a hundred-year period. The first two chapters of Lombroso's classic text deal with the impact of meteorological, topographical, and climatic influences on crime. Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), 1–20. For more recent work see Peter Blastenbrei, "Violence, Arms and Criminal Justice in Papal Rome, 1560–1600," *Renaissance Studies* 20.1 (2006): 68–87, [dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2006.00112.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2006.00112.x).

temperatures experienced in winter. In fact, in these regions, animals by far outnumbered people in the period under study.⁴ While the landscapes of the regions we study varied considerably, they were tied together by the importance of seasonal rhythms to the lived experience of their inhabitants.⁵

Conventional modern definitions of the seasonal year are normally based on changes to the weather and growing seasons, and there is ample evidence to support the notion that premodern Italians drew on similar definitions to structure their community life. Rural statutes often defined community activities according to seasonal rhythms related to weather and the agricultural year. For example, several Tuscan communities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stipulated that in the month of May everyone was to plant a garden or risk paying a fine.⁶ Others demonstrated an understanding of the connection of particular health risks to different seasons, defining timetables of street cleaning, waste disposal, and animal slaughtering according to season.⁷ While statutes depict the idealized life of a community, other sources bear out the seasonal routines that they suggest. For instance, letters written by urban householders such as Margherita Datini, wife of the well-known “merchant of Prato” Francesco Datini, and Alessandra Strozzi, mother of Filippo, describe the seasonal cycles of their households’ diet, building works, and illnesses in detail.⁸ Outside cities, the seasonal routines of the agricultural year had a

4. An average of more than two hundred thousand animals travelled from the Apennines to the Siense Maremma each year for the winter. Ovidio Dell’Omodarme, “La transumanza in Toscana nei secoli XVII e XVIII,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 100/2 (1988): 961, dx.doi.org/10.3406/mefr.1988.2998.

5. We thus argue that different geographic regions should not be studied in isolation from each other. See the work of Jon Mathieu for the argument that mountains, in particular, “have never been another world” apart from other regions and landscapes in premodern Europe. Jon Mathieu, *History of the Alps, 1500–1900: Environment, Development, and Society* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009), 228.

6. Archivio di Stato, Firenze [hereinafter ASF], *Statuti delle comunità autonome e soggette* no. 403, 10v.

7. See Guy Geltner’s work on the connection between health and public hygiene and safety measures: for example, “Healthscaping a Medieval City: Lucca’s *Curia viarum* and the Future of Public Health History,” *Urban History* 40 2013: 395–415. It would be particularly interesting to look at sources dealing with these measures, such as *bande*, statutes, and court records, through a seasonal lens.

8. See Margherita Datini, *Letters to Francesco Datini*, ed. and trans. Carolyn James and Antonio Pagliaro (Toronto: Iter Press, 2012). For Alessandra Strozzi’s letters, see Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, *Letters to Her Sons (1447–1470)*, ed. and trans. Judith Bryce (Toronto: Iter Press, 2016).

notable impact on economic and social life. For instance, the transhumance began in October, when herders drove animals into mountain pastures or lower lying plains; this annual routine caused the absence of many men from the community for a lengthy period of time and likely presented women with new opportunities at home, as we will discuss.⁹ Factors such as the regular return of plague in warmer months also shaped the urban/rural relationship in the period after 1348, as wealthy householders planned when to escape the encroaching disease by moving into their country estates.¹⁰ Seasonal routines, then, anchored many aspects of the social and economic life of rural regions and their inhabitants in this period beyond those directly related to agriculture.

In the rest of this article, we want to move beyond the study of seasonal activity in agriculture to explore two further aspects of rural life that can be fruitfully examined through a seasonal lens: parish church activities and crime and revolt. Both of these aspects of rural life were shaped by changing seasonal routines within their communities. Warm weather and longer days provided opportunities for travel and social activities, and these periods of the year could also bring outsiders into communities that were otherwise remote and isolated. Winter was a time when the absence of men and outsiders might also give a different shape to community life. But it is not enough to argue that the changing seasons determined modes of life in rural communities. Instead, our sources suggest that studying the activities of rural inhabitants—and the authorities who governed them—through a seasonal lens reveals otherwise invisible realities about social relationships in those communities.

A valuable source for a seasonal analysis of the rural Christian church is the regular visitations of rural churches by urban ecclesiastical officials from the late medieval through the early modern periods. In their structure and scheduling, visitations provide a view of the impact of seasonality on power relations between urban clergy and the inhabitants of rural communities and on devotional and social activities within rural churches. Visitations normally followed a seasonal calendar. That is, throughout Italy in the premodern period, bishops usually visited the rural areas of their dioceses to check on the state of churches, clergy, and the local laity when warm weather arrived in April or

9. See J. R. McNeill, *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20, [dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511529023](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511529023).

10. Margherita, writing to Francesco, described “dangerous seasons” for epidemic disease. Datini, letter 17 (20 February 1388).

when the heat of the summer had passed at the end of August.¹¹ For instance, in April and May of 1372, during a period of peace that followed decades of social and political violence in the Pistoiese countryside, or *contado*, the bishop undertook a visitation to churches throughout his diocese. In April he concentrated his efforts on the churches within the city, and in May he travelled into the countryside to visit the baptismal churches (*pievi*), monasteries, and hospitals of the *contado*, sometimes visiting more than one church in the same long day. A visitation required a significant amount of energy both on the part of the episcopal entourage and the clergy and laypeople of the local community under scrutiny. Expenses relating to the visit were usually shared between the local institutions hosting the retinue. In Pistoia, clerics worked to bring together the liturgical items and books for the episcopal visitor to examine and compare with inventories from earlier periods. The scribe who accompanied the visitor then compiled a new inventory, noting which items were missing and the condition of those present. Local lay men also submitted themselves to the scrutiny of the visitor, answering questions about the state of the church and their priest. Some might complain about clerical misdemeanours such as drinking, playing cards, or keeping a woman in his house, while others could take the opportunity to praise their priest's "honesty" and commitment to his position. We can imagine the fatigue of the episcopal party as they journeyed from one village to the next over unfamiliar terrain, the nervousness of the local clerics as they compared items in the sacristy with those on old inventories, and the anxiety or perhaps excitement of those waiting to speak to these unfamiliar visitors.¹² The social bonds formed around these activities would be noteworthy and memorable.

But moving beyond simple descriptions of who encountered whom during these visitations, a close examination of the significance of their seasonal aspects reveals new ways of understanding the relationships between urban ecclesiastics and rural clergy and laity. The fact that episcopal visitations

11. See further examples of similar seasonal visitations in the dioceses of Cortona (Noemi Meoni, ed., "Visite pastorali a Cortona nel Trecento," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 129 [1971]: 181–256); Ivrea (Ilo Vignono, ed., *Visite Pastorali in Diocesi di Ivrea negli anni 1329 e 1346* [Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1980]); and Bergamo (Archivio della Curia Diocesana di Bergamo, CAP 44, 196v–208r.) Alessandra Strozzi described the problem of travelling in winter in her letters: e.g., Strozzi, Letter 2 (4 November 1448), 35.

12. For an example of a visitation to two communities ten kilometres apart on the same day, see Pistoia, Archivio Diocesano, Curia Vescovile di Pistoia (AVP), Visite Pastorali, Busta 1, 85r–86v, 30 May 1372.

to rural areas generally took place in warm, mild months tends to be ignored or under-analyzed in most scholarship. It would be easy to assume that these periods of the year, with their longer days and comfortable temperatures, simply made travel easier for officials and their entourages.¹³ But apart from the season in which they took place, the nature of rural visitations varied from their urban winter counterparts in some notable ways. First, they were often quite brief. We can see the differences in the detailed records of urban and rural visitations organized by Bishop Francesco dal Legname of the diocese of Ferrara between 1447 and 1451. Ferrarese officials' visits to urban churches in this period took place during the winter at a relatively relaxed pace. During 1447–48, the bishop's vicar general, Deutesalvus de Fulgineo, spent one day a week from November through the spring visiting churches and monasteries within the city, visiting just one church per week and often celebrating Mass and speaking to “many” clergy and laypeople during those visits. By contrast, in the late summer of 1448, the bishop himself began travelling into the countryside with an entourage, visiting rural churches across the diocese at times almost daily until October. The group of officials visited thirty-seven churches in the southern regions of the diocese in twenty-five days between the months of August and October 1448, meaning that the bishop visited an average of one and a half churches daily. At one point, in a four-day period between September 8 and 11, the bishop and his entourage visited ten different churches.¹⁴ They then travelled along the banks of the Po river to visit a further twenty-two churches in sixteen days during April and May 1449. Certainly the officials spent a long time at a few locations along these routes, and they did occasionally mark the solemnity of the visit with the celebration of a mass, a sermon preached by a member of the entourage, and a meal shared with local clergy and notable community members (all male).¹⁵ But they also spent just a

13. Like the hottest period of the year, winter months would have made travel more challenging. Rain was a frequent concern in the winter season in Tuscany. In her letters to her husband Francesco, Margherita Datini often complained about the limits placed on activities in her household by the wet weather. Datini, *Letters* 10 (16 January 1386), 142 (23 October 1397), 182 (19 November 1398), and 201 (27 February 1399).

14. Enrico Peverada, ed. *La visita pastorale del vescovo Francesco Dal Legname a Ferrara (1447–1450)* (Ferrara, 1982), 240–50.

15. Such as the one at the baptismal church (*pieve*) of Sienta on 27 April 1449, the first visit of the spring tour. Peverada, ed., *La visita pastorale del vescovo Francesco Dal Legname a Ferrara (1447–1450)*, 277.

few hours at many other churches, leaving at midday to travel to another site, or even meeting with clergy and laypeople from two churches at a time.

Such brief visits, particularly when they were undertaken by the bishop himself, could both articulate and reinforce the distance between the experiences of these officials and the rural laity. By appearing in the community rather than sending his deputy, the bishop emphasized his personal authority over the area, but the fact that many of these visits were fleeting would have made it difficult for clergy to address the problems of poverty and other kinds of distress that rural churches faced. And since these visits normally took place in the mildest periods of the year, they protected officials from the harshest realities of the laity's lives. A visitor might be told of or even see the church's missing roof or the fact that the windows had no coverings to protect from the wind, or he might hear from the priest that his house was in such a state of disrepair (*male ordinata*) that he could not live in it. But these details would make less of an impact on the official hearing them on a pleasant, dry spring or autumn day than they would in a rainy, cold January or February.¹⁶ Since few church officials ventured into the rural regions of their dioceses in the winter months, they had only a partial understanding of the daily challenges facing rural clergy and laypeople.¹⁷ For most bishops and their officials, rural parishes and their inhabitants were nearly invisible from November until March.

While the scheduling of visitations may have originated in pragmatic concerns about weather and comfort, we further posit that it also reflected (and perhaps reinforced) urban ecclesiastical interest in certain aspects of rural society and disregard for others. Notably, travelling into rural areas in the spring or early fall allowed bishops and their officials to ensure that they would have access to male householders, since in that period many men in rural mountain communities would have returned to their home communities from the transhumance. Looking at the visitations through a seasonal lens thus suggests church officials' belief in the importance of men, not women,

16. See complaints about the state of churches made to the bishop of Ferrara on his visits to churches in the diocese in September and October of 1450. Pevereda, ed., *La visita pastorale del vescovo Francesco Dal Legname a Ferrara*, 307–08, 331, 327, 321, 340.

17. Some parish clerics may also have been absent from these areas in the winter months. See a 1525 visitation from the diocese of Pistoia in which the bishop reproved a parish priest for failing to say Mass on feast days and Sundays from November to February. AVP, Visite Pastorali, Busta 5, inserto 2, 23r.

as representatives of the laity within their communities.¹⁸ And yet the urban clergy's valorization of male voices in rural communities did not reflect the gender organization of Christian church life in those communities. Once again, a seasonal lens on our sources reveals otherwise-invisible information about rural life. Since many men were away from rural communities for long periods of time, women played active roles within the church in their absence. This dichotomy is borne out by a startling record from a seventeenth-century visitation to the mountain community of Cutigliano. During this particular visitation, the bishop Gherardini made the extraordinary statement that in the future, women would be forbidden from acting as sacristans for the church of San Bartolomeo.¹⁹ Clearly, this pronouncement was made in response to his observation of women from the town doing just that. The fact that women occupied such a crucial role within the parish church could be interpreted as a sign of a radically progressive community; however, what we know about the seasonal patterns of this region leads us to a very different interpretation, one that emphasizes pragmatism. The seasonal mobility of the male population of this town appears to have resulted in the development of an active female ownership of and participation in the parish life of the town. Linked to this, there is compelling evidence of significant female membership in the lay confraternity of the Compagnia della Nostra Donna of Cutigliano.²⁰ It may also help us to understand why this particular area of the Florentine territory had been such an important Savonarolan stronghold at the end of the fifteenth century, actively cultivated by Savonarolan preachers with a number of key Savonarolan women emerging from these remote mountain communities and rising to

18. In most cases, officials interviewed exclusively male parishioners when they interacted with the laity. See examples from Pistoia: AVP, Visite Pastorali, Busta 1, 85r (Cutigliano, 30 May 1372).

19. The 1679–80 visitation of the *vescovo* Gherardini is cited in Elena Vannucchi, "La Fisionomia delle Parrocchie della Montagna Pistoiese dal Quattrocento all'epoca Ricciana," in *La parrocchia montana nei secoli XV–XVIII, Atti delle giornate di studio (Capugnano, 11 e 12 settembre 1993)*, ed. Paola Fosci (Bologna–Porretta Terme–Pistoia: Deputazione di storia patria per le province di Romagna, 1994), 40.

20. In 1517, the membership list of this confraternity included 340 women and 105 men, while in 1542 with the population reduction experienced by these communities the list includes 167 women and 51 men. Archivio di Stato, Pistoia (ASPist). Patrimonio Ecclesiastico, 1:95. This is discussed in more detail in Cecilia Hewlett, *Rural Communities in Renaissance Tuscany, Religious Identities and Local Loyalties* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 192–95, dx.doi.org/10.1484/M.ES-EB.5.106012.

considerable fame.²¹ The seasonal mobility of the men of the community makes it easier to understand why women in this region would have had an increased reliance on local confraternities or religious communities for support. It may also have led to women playing a much more active role in the administration of the parish church and having a greater sense of ownership over these sacred spaces.²² Clearly, however, ecclesiastical officials were unimpressed—even threatened—by such an active female presence in these churches.

The seasonal movement of people posed a similarly challenging problem to ecclesiastical authorities in their effective implementation of Tridentine reforms.²³ Post Trent, visitation officials had a renewed focus on ensuring parish priests kept accurate records of marriages, baptisms, burials, Easter communicants, and states of confession. For those communities with mobile populations, this was extremely difficult to verify, particularly as the return of the transhumant labour force coincided with the beginning of the Easter season. In response, priests came to depend on a voucher or certificate system so that labourers could prove they had taken confession in another jurisdiction and were in a state of grace so they could participate in the Easter Eucharist.²⁴ Exploring the seasonal nature of visitations thus hints at a divide between the

21. For example, the considerable following built up by Dorotea of Lanciuole, who rose to fame at the beginning of the sixteenth century, establishing her own religious community with the support of the friars of San Marco. Lorenzo Polizzotto comments that the attention of Savonarolan preachers on this particularly poor region of the Florentine territory was “inexplicable.” Polizzotto, “When Saints Fall Out: Women and the Savonarolan Reform in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 46.3 (Autumn, 1993): 494, dx.doi.org/10.2307/3039103.

22. There are numerous references in the visitation records for this region to women bringing chairs into church, leaning on altars, leaving before the end of Mass, and generally causing disturbances in church. See for example AVP, Visite Pastorali, Busta 5, Inserto 2, 16r, 36v, 38v, 41r, 42v.

23. Matteo Al Kalak discusses the church’s use of pastoral visitations as a strategy for implementing the prescriptions of the Council of Trent in mountain communities, in “Reformed Mountains: Social and Religious Control Strategies in the Tusco-Emilian Apennines,” in *Conquistare la montagna. Storia di un’idea / Conquering Mountains: The History of an Idea*, ed. M. Al Kalak and C. Baja Guarienti (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2016), 23–37.

24. This was a standard expectation set out during the visitation of 1530 to the Pistoian mountains. Priests required proof from those men returning to their communities from the Maremma that they had made confession while they were away. According to the visitation records, this proof was required within eight days of their return home. See for example the accounts of visitations to the communities of Lizzano, Cutigliano and Pupiglio AVP, Visite Pastorali, Busta 5, Inserto 2, 16r, 20r, 24r.

perspectives and ideals of urban ecclesiastics and the lived experience of rural inhabitants within their churches.

We have already suggested that the intense schedule of rural visitations meant that officials sometimes spent only a few hours in each place they visited, and we have also suggested that rural regions were unlikely to see a bishop or other significant ecclesiastical official for much of the winter. These realities, we contend, marked the divide between urban ecclesiastics and rural clergy and laity and further enhanced episcopal authority. Furthermore, if the winter was normally a time when urban church officials were absent from rural areas, an ecclesiastical entourage arriving in a rural region during winter months would have made a significant impression on local communities. We might assume that only a bishop who was deeply concerned about regulating the state of the souls in a region would make such a journey at that time of year. This suggestion is borne out by an examination of a visitation in the northern Italian diocese of Como in the mid-fifteenth century.²⁵ Between mid-February and early March of 1445, the bishop of Como, Gerardo Landriani, accompanied by Bertramo de Montono, abbot of the monastery of S. Abbondio, and Stefano Appiani, a canon lawyer and the episcopal vicar and cathedral cantor, visited thirty-four rural churches, hospitals, and monasteries, starting in Domaso on Lake Como and travelling more than one hundred kilometres one way into the mountainous Valtellina. At this altitude the warmer temperatures of spring would still be several weeks away, and yet on most of those days the officials and their entourage also travelled as much as twenty kilometres. We can assume that even on horseback their rate of travel would have been very slow, perhaps as little as three kilometres per hour. That means that as many as five or six hours per day would have been taken up in travelling from one place to another.²⁶ Despite the time spent on the journey, the officials' visitations of churches were far from perfunctory.²⁷ On most days the entourage not only visited more than one church or religious institution, they interviewed clerics

25. Elisabetta Canobbio, ed., *La Visita Pastorale di Gerardo Landriani alla diocesi di Como (1444–1445)* (Milan: Unicopli, 2001).

26. Thanks to Judith Owens, an experienced winter horse rider in Manitoba, for information about horse travel in these conditions.

27. Post Trent, visitations to mountain communities were more frequent and took greater time than those in lower lying or urban areas. Matteo Al Kalak speculates that this is because of the region's strategic importance. See Al Kalak, 31.

and religious for what must have been hours about their training and daily lives, for instance asking probing questions about priests' understanding of the sacraments and the composition of their households. The ecclesiastical visitors then held large gatherings of clergy and laymen from the community when the visit was complete to ensure that their orders and instructions were carried out. The instructions to clergy that followed these visits provide some of the most detailed and memorable information about clerical mores available for this period.²⁸ Arguably, the bishop articulated his deep concern for reform and clerical competence—and his interest in asserting his authority over the region—in his willingness to travel these distances during winter.²⁹

Viewing visitation records through a seasonal lens thus brings a new perspective to our understanding of the relationships between urban ecclesiastics and rural dwellers, both clerics and laypeople, from the later medieval through the post-Tridentine period. But visitation records provide only a glimpse of the impact of seasonality on the lived experience of rural churches and their parishioners and clerics. A close-up view of such realities can be found in the relatively unknown sixteenth-century diary, or *ricordanza*, of a parish priest from the Tuscan town of Popiglio—one Girolamo Magni.³⁰ Popiglio is located just outside of San Marcello Pistoiese, on the river Lima in the Pistoian Mountains. Magni's diary spans five decades from 1540 to 1590; like many contemporary *ricordanze*, it intersperses news of great affairs of state with local happenings and personal musings, with little or no differentiation between them. Magni's colourful descriptions of the periodic arrival of episcopal visitations reinforce our understanding of the pomp and drama that accompanied these visits. They also leave us in no doubt of the politics that surrounded them. For example, after one such visitation, Magni complained that a number of local tavern keepers falsely accused him of being responsible for confraternities no longer being allowed to hold communal meals to celebrate important feast days, when this had been stipulated by the bishop.³¹ No doubt, the tavern keepers were concerned about the loss of income as well

28. Such as the instruction to the archpriest at Berbenio to erase "the figures of naked women" (*mulierum nudarum*) that had been painted on the walls of his living room (*saleta*) or risk a fine of ten gold florins. Canobbio, ed., 146.

29. Elisabetta Canobbio argues that the bishops of Como were particularly invested in the well-being of the inhabitants of the Valtellina during the fifteenth century. Canobbio, ed., 10–11.

30. *Il Diario del Piovano Girolamo Magni: Vita, devozione e arte sulla montagna pistoiese nel Cinquecento*, ed. Franca Falletti (Pistoia: Pacini Editore, 1999).

31. Magni, 123r, 157.

as the opportunity to come together as a community on these occasions. The overarching narrative of the diary is the story of Magni's struggle to maintain control of the parish and ensure his benefice was passed down to his nephew. Through this struggle we are given considerable insight into the interaction of seasonal rhythms with the complex political interests of even such a modest benefice.

Reading the text through a seasonal lens demonstrates first the interwoven realities of the agricultural and ecclesiastical years. Magni regularly reflected upon the impact of the seasons on the wellbeing of the local community, noting when unusual weather disrupted the coming harvest and reflecting on how these disruptions would increase the material difficulties faced by the community. In fact, his diary gives the impression that his concern for the harvest and preoccupation with the length and nature of the seasons was an equal if not greater preoccupation for him than any significant affairs of state or the church—including the spread of Lutheran heresies. At a certain point in his text he even defends this approach, saying his readers may criticize the way that he has “mixed the spears with the cleavers” but they must remember that he undertook to recount things that happened to him or his community.³² Set between his account of the momentous occasion of his very first Mass said in the church of Santa Maria di Popiglio on 5 April 1556 (which had taken twenty-nine folios to get to), and his entry of 20 April recording the conquest of Siena, is the rather stark reflection: “and here to note that from February of this year until May it has hardly rained so the mountain was covered in forest.”³³ This is one of literally hundreds of entries concerned with the weather and its impact on the community, the land, and the harvest, which are scattered throughout the diary: e.g., “This year on the 13 February 1572, when we had hoped spring had arrived, there was a great snowfall which settled across the land, building up until the 18th of this month, so that for lack of feed, many animals died.”³⁴ The following year, the cold weather persisted until June,

32. “So che chi leggerà questo libro, dirà ch'io habbia miscolato le lancie con le mannaie, le cose de'grandi con quelle de'piccoli e le piccole con le grandi, sdimenticandosi ch'io ho proposto di scrivere ciò che occorrerà a me o a altri di questo popolo.” Magni 105r, 148.

33. “Ed è qui da notare che da febbraio di questo anno sino a maggio non piovve quasi mai.” Magni, 29r, 104.

34. “E stato notabile questo anno che a 13 di febbraio 1572, quando si sperava che fusse venuta la primavera, venne una nievaia grandissima e durò continuamente sopra la terra, aggiugnendo neve a

causing five or six of the community to die from respiratory illness.³⁵ A couple of years later the weather was kinder to them, resulting in mulberries covered in leaves, vines thriving, and chestnuts of a quantity they had never seen.³⁶ The juxtaposition of personal narrative, affairs of state, and weather reports with no apparent organizational hierarchy may seem jarring to the modern reader, but it provides further evidence for the fundamental importance of seasonal weather patterns on the lived experience of these communities. The impact of seasonal fluctuations was a matter of life and death for the inhabitants of mountain villages such as Popiglio, something that is easy for historians to forget in a time when our own experience of the seasons is so mediated by modern technology. Seasonal fluctuations could have catastrophic results, whether due to direct exposure to the elements, crop failures, shortages (or excess) of water, or disease transmission.

Beyond their constant concern with weather and crops, Magni's diary entries follow a seasonal pattern that echoes those of the episcopal visitations. Time and time again, the months between November and February are skipped all together and it is easy to get the impression that Magni lived in an endless spring and summer or that the winter months were somehow less eventful for these communities.³⁷ There is one exception to this pattern of entries and that is the significant proportion of Magni's diary given over to his descriptions of the restoration and decoration of the parish church. Much of this work appears to have taken place between November and February, perhaps for the very reason that there was less of a demand for use of this space during those months. In November 1571, Magni organized the construction of a covered walkway between the church of Popiglio and the bell tower, as well as restoration work on two altars inside the church; he opened a door to the bell tower, painted the church, repaired a number of walls, and commissioned a representation of the

nieve sino a i 19 del mese di marzo, onde per carestia di strame morirono molte bestie." Magni, 57r, 122.

35. Magni, 65v, 127. In another entry from July 1580, Magni describes in great detail the impact of summer storms on causing an outbreak of fever or "mal di monotone, o castrone o pecorone; veniva prima gran caldo cominciando da le piante de'piedi e camminava per tutto il corpo." 96v, 144.

36. Magni, 71r. 130.

37. For example, in the years 1574/75 entries are made on the following dates: 1 November, 9 Feb, 8 April, 13 May, 16 July, 1 August, 8 August, 9 August, 15 August, 22 August, 17 September, 26 March, 24 April. Magni, 126–28.

Last Supper for the altar of the Virgin Mary.³⁸ The following year in November, the prior of the Company of Corpus Domini arranged for a column of stone to be transported from a quarry to the church for the construction of a chapel for the confraternity (Magni noted that the difficult work of the transportation of the stone column up the mountain proceeded despite the fact that it was snowing), and the chapel was finished by 12 January.³⁹ In this instance, the practical challenges of undertaking heavy transportation and construction work during this season must have been outweighed by the availability of labour, with less work to be done in the fields over the winter months, and perhaps reflected the slower rhythm of community activities during this period.⁴⁰ This interpretation is supported by the statutes of a number of neighbouring mountain communities, which reveal seasonal patterns of community meetings and events.⁴¹

The recognition of seasonal influences on political processes can bring into focus the degree to which local actors made calculated strategic decisions based on an understanding of seasonal ebbs and flows. This is evident in 1594 when, toward the end of Magni's text, he describes the challenge to his control of the benefice from a rival priest, Lazzero.⁴² In many ways, his entire diary is building to this point, establishing his rightful credentials as parish priest in Popiglio for over forty years. The dispute between the two men reached a crescendo when Magni, in his old age, attempted to install his nephew as priest in his place. Lazzero challenged his right to do so, and unable to agree on a way forward, Magni turned to the duke to uphold his claim. The reply came back

38. Magni, 121.

39. Magni, 125.

40. These seasonal patterns reflected what occurred on a larger scale in the forced labour programs put in place under successive Medici dukes. Historians have noted that these programs tried to avoid large scale conscription during the harvest months of July and August and accepted that they would have to pay higher rates for labour between May and October because these were the months of greatest work in the agricultural calendar. See Suzanne B. Butters, "The Medici Dukes, Comandati and Prato: Forced Labour in Renaissance Florence," in *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. John E. Law and Bernadette Paton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 260.

41. For example, in the commune of Cutigliano, the 1st of May marked a significant moment in the calendar of the community when all the men came together "in the usual place" at the ringing of the bell, in order to determine the arrangements for the management of pasturelands for the rest of the season. ASF, Statuti delle comunità autonome e soggette, 296 Cutigliano, 1496, 4r.

42. Magni, 187.

from Florence that the will of the community should prevail and the matter should be put to a vote. While the ducal instruction to proceed with the vote was given in January, Magni decided to wait until Palm Sunday to undertake the vote, so that “the men were back from Grosseto.”⁴³ Implicit in this decision was the understanding that a representative process could not take place until winter had come to an end and the transhumant labourers had returned. Magni knew that many of the men whose vote he was counting on were absent and his chances of success would be diminished. His decision was justified; when the vote finally did take place, his supporters overwhelmingly outnumbered those of his rival, 107 votes to 38.⁴⁴ Magni’s *ricordanza* thus provides an up-close view of how one rural parish managed the challenges and opportunities provided by seasonal change.

Thus far, we have argued that thinking seasonally about the activities of ecclesiastical officials gives a better understanding of the lived experience of Christianity in rural regions of Italy, emphasizing how a seasonal perspective not only reveals the tensions and divisions between urban officials and rural dwellers, but also provides a clearer view of the particular ways in which rural inhabitants created their own social and religious bonds in response to the needs of their communities. We now turn to a secular sphere in which seasonal analysis provides crucial historical context for rural life: the structure and function of revolt, political action, and policing in this period. Samuel K. Cohn has argued that the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries saw numerous communities in rural Italy rise in “open confrontation” against political and ecclesiastical authorities.⁴⁵ Cohn argues that these revolts were not simply spontaneous expressions of unrest but planned rebellions against the social systems of the period. While Cohn does not examine the seasonal structure of revolts, investigating the relationship between revolts and the seasons of the year bolsters his argument for their rational nature. Information from extant sources suggests that, like visitations, full-scale rural revolts against authorities—that is, armed massed occupations of buildings or territories that

43. “Intanto il Piovano aspettò che gli huomini tornasser da Grosseto.” Magni, 188.

44. Magni, 189.

45. Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 26, 42, 48–52. Unfortunately for our purposes, Cohn does not consistently provide dates for the revolts he describes, so we have traced references within the sources he has read for this information.

threatened or caused harm to individuals—normally took place in a relatively limited period of the year, when warmer temperatures, longer daylight hours, and less onerous work schedules prevailed.⁴⁶

There is no shortage of archival material from Italian sources across the premodern period that would allow for a systematic study and quantification of seasonal patterns of different categories of crime. For the era before 1500, the sources are rather fragmentary, comprising chronicles and the occasional court record found within surviving notarial registers. By the sixteenth century, documentary materials become more systematic, both in their structure and in their presence in archives. All of these records reveal that large, massed revolts took place almost exclusively in the spring and summer months.⁴⁷ The *Diario d'anonimo Fiorentino*, a chronicle of political and social events in central Italy, identifies rebellions against the church in Tuscany, the Marche, and Emilia during the mid-fourteenth century.⁴⁸ These mainly occurred in the period between March and October, with little happening in the countryside in particular during the months from November to February. This information encourages a view of rural armed revolt as a feature of a routinized, seasonal year, rather than a completely spontaneous demonstration against ecclesiastical or secular power.⁴⁹

46. With the exception of one striking example of a revolt in Modena in the winter of 1305, which was facilitated when local rivers and streams froze over, allowing men to cross into the territory in large numbers (Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, 44). Patterns of summer violence involving the Pistoian factions are also evident during the years of acute factional conflict, 1499–1504, vividly described in Bastiano Buoni, “De’casi di Pistoia 1499 al 1504,” Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (BNF), Fondo Rossi-Cassigoli, 371, 2r–112r.

47. Another contemporary chronicle by an anonymous author identifies revolts mainly within the city of Florence in the later fourteenth century. In the city, these occurred in both winter and summer months, but as in other sources there was little focus on the countryside in the coldest period of the year. See Anthony Molho and Franek Sznura, eds., *Alle Bocche della Piazza: Diario di Anonimo Fiorentino (1382–1401)* (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1986).

48. The text can be found in *Cronache dei secoli XIII e XIV, Documenti di Storia Italiana* (Firenze, 1876), 293–481.

49. It is possible that while summer was a time for revolt, the winter months were a time for drawing up petitions and laying out grievances, as seen in an example cited by Cohn in a collection of sources, in January of 1348, when rural landholders outside Florence presented a petition to the priors of the city asking that rural communes whose statutes had “oppressed” their tenants and workers be fined. Samuel

This observation can shape the way historians read the descriptions of revolts in the archival records, de-emphasizing their more dramatic and “spontaneous” elements in favour of a view of the events as the product of planning by rational political actors. For instance, a fragmentary record in a register from the diocesan archive in Pistoia describes a revolt that took place in the summer of 1344 in Verghereto, a village to the south of Pistoia within the region (*districtus*) administered by the archpriest (*pievano*) of Carmignano.⁵⁰ On June 29, the feast day of St. Peter, the priest Freschus, chaplain of the *pievano* of Carmignano, came to Verghereto to celebrate the Mass in the church dedicated to the apostle. He told the episcopal court that he was standing at the altar of the church dressed in his liturgical robes when a group of locals, inspired, he asserted, by a “demonic spirit” (*diabolico spiritu*) and with “will to molest” (*animo turbandi*), burst into the church, brandishing weapons, chanting, and making a disturbance (*tumultum facientes*). They insulted and threatened him, he told the court, to the extent that he did not dare celebrate the Mass as planned. One way to see this event is to adopt the priest’s perspective and characterize the event as the product of unruly, hot-headed rustics, or devilish chaos agents. Historians, too, have sometimes assumed a similar point of view when considering what motivated their pre-modern subjects to engage in violent acts.⁵¹ Such a perspective portrays these events as colourful and dramatic but ignores the serious motivations that lay behind them. It therefore minimizes the real significance of the events for both victims and perpetrators alike, and also downplays the possibility that they involved rational elements such as advanced planning.

Certainly, many of the witnesses to the incident in Verghereto focused on the loud, noisy, threatening spectacle of armed men massing in the square outside and then marching on the altar. Some described how the men threw

K. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 81–82, dx.doi.org/10.7765/9781526112767.

50. AVP, 3 C #4, Mercenario, 48r–56v, 28 July 1344.

51. For instance, a venerable collection of primary sources in translation presents a narrative about a conflict between laymen and a cleric in another fourteenth-century Italian mountain community that resulted in the kidnap and gang rape of the cleric’s sister over a two-day period. In the subheading to the document, the editor refers to the events as an “escapade in the Apennines,” a characterization which arguably downplays any planned elements of the event. Gene Brucker, ed., *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 104.

the chalice and host to the floor, overturned the predella, and picked up the priest and held him against the altar. But other witnesses pointed out that these actions were not groundless. Several of the witnesses understood the reasons for the attack, explaining that it was born out of serious and likely longstanding concerns about church and community governance rather than impulsive anger. For instance, apparently those who invaded the church shouted “viva il popolo” and “we have been betrayed” (*nos sumus traditi*). One witness explained that the parishioners were concerned that if the chaplain of the *pievano* celebrated the Mass, the village would lose their “right” to their own priest.⁵² Another noted that he had heard that the *pievano* wanted to “occupy” the church. These descriptions present the invasion of the church not as a frivolous escapade but as a rational response to a set of grievances about ecclesiastical governance. Furthermore, if we consider the time of year in which it was organized, the planned and managed aspects of the event stand out even more. It took place not only on a feast day, but also at a time of the year when rural dwellers had time and energy to spare, when warm weather and extended daylight might allow those planning a massed gathering to count on a substantial show of support. Although we have no hard evidence to suggest that the inhabitants of Verghereto had a longstanding plan for this uprising, these facts, taken together, force us to consider the possibility that it was not spontaneous. Seeing these events at least partially through a seasonal lens allows us to see past the mayhem and the colourful drama of such events to the likely fact that they may have been methodically planned and organized by serious political actors.

As we move into the sixteenth century, archival records become more systematically organized and locatable. We can thus explore, for instance, a four-year cycle of activity between 1538 and 1542 for the magistracy responsible for overseeing the mountain communities of Pistoia, the *Pratica Segreta di Pistoia e Pontremoli*. The patterns emerging from these records provide further insights into the impact of seasonal routines on the experiences of the inhabitants of these mountainous regions and the mechanisms employed by local governments and territorial powers to adjust for these differences.⁵³ Notably, they indicate that both authorities and rural dwellers took the seasons into account as they planned their activities.

52. AVP, Mercenario, 48v–49v. The regular rector of the church, the priest Benericordatus, was present on the day of the attack and gave testimony to the court.

53. ASE, *Pratica Segreta di Pistoia e Pontremoli*, 3, fols. 1–181v.

The *Pratica Segreta* was established to monitor and control the factional violence rife in this part of the territory during the sixteenth century. The topographical extremes of this region have long been connected by historians to the persistence of factional violence in the mountains, but no attention has been given to the impact of seasonal variations on these patterns of unrest. By examining how these so-called spontaneous outbreaks of factional violence fitted into a seasonal rhythm of criminal activity, we can enrich our understanding of the social dynamics at play in these communities. For instance, the very business of governing the Florentine territory was intimately connected to, and informed by, the changing seasons. From the point of view of the administration, these seasonal patterns of revolt and rebellion translated into strategies of control. Florentine authorities knew that certain criminal behaviours were more likely to take place at particular times of year, and they responded accordingly. For example, it is not by chance that in the sixteenth century, the captain of the Pistoian mountains and his retinue of notaries, officials, and guards alternated between two locations over the course of the year. Between the months of March and October, the captain was based in Cutigliano, a town located at one of the highest altitude points before passing over the Bolognese border.⁵⁴ Cutigliano was at the heart of the region plagued by factional conflict, as well as being a hotbed for smugglers seeking to transport grain, wine, cheese, and even animals into neighbouring territories. The mountains were an ideal hiding place for those exiled for crime or with a price on their heads. A strong Florentine presence in the area at this time of year not only sent a powerful signal to would-be criminals but provided the necessary administrative apparatus to deal with higher rates of criminal activity. In the winter months, when snow rendered the mountains impassable and many of the men of the community had relocated with their flocks to the Maremma, the captain and his staff would move back farther down the mountain to the town of San Marcello Pistoiese, where he would reside from October to March. This pattern of residency reflected a strategy of control that was based on an intimate understanding of the patterns and needs of the communities in question.

These structural realities reveal that the Florentine government understood that crime in the countryside had a seasonal pattern. For example, we know that there was an increased number of cases of *danno dato* between March and June each year as foraging animals damaged property and crops

54. For lists of captain of the mountains office holders see ASF, Archivio delle Tratte, 14.

in search of food during this period.⁵⁵ Summer provided an opportunity for crop raiding, an activity that required a greater degree of coordination and usually involved multiple actors.⁵⁶ When it was time for the scheduled food and livestock markets that took place throughout the territory, taverns and main transport thoroughfares regularly appear in the sources as the setting for violent scuffles.⁵⁷ Smuggling crimes were concentrated in the months from August through December, once harvests were complete and before the mountain passes were cut off by snow.⁵⁸ Over the period in question, the records of the Pratica Segreta suggest a seasonal rhythm in both the quantity and nature of the day-to-day business of the magistracy. During winter, records were less frequent and evidence of the factional violence that the Pratica was set up to oversee is sparse.⁵⁹ This is not particularly surprising given what we know of the territory. This season coincided with the period of transhumance, when many of those holding crucial positions in factional groupings would have been

55. It is unclear whether this type of crime was actually more prevalent at this time of year or whether it was more actively policed because of the damage it could do to crops/production volume. Gregory Hanlon made a similar observation in relation to the frequency of property damage in years of famine, i.e., that the community was more sensitive to crimes of this nature during moments of hardship. Gregory Hanlon, *Human Nature in Rural Tuscany: An Early Modern History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 83, dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230603035.

56. Large scale crop raiding was a feature of the 1499–1502 Pistoian civil war. “Et in detti tempi per l’una parte et per l’altra si attendeva a fare buone ricolte benché i Panciatichi tagliarino assai grani di quegli de Canciglieri pure ognuno attendeva a rubare le ricolte l’uno all’altro.” BNF, Fondo Rossi-Cassigoli, 371. De’casi di Pistoia 1499 al 1504, 75r.

57. In the sixteenth century, this concentration of violent crime at key points throughout the calendar resulted in the deployment of militia troops and increased border controls at such points to maintain order. See, for example, ASF, *Otto di Pratica*, Missive, 37, fol. 32r on the *fiera* in Casentino and fol. 36r on the *fiera* in Firenzeuola.

58. The Ufficiali dell’Abbondanza had their work cut out for them during the smuggling season. The Pistoian mountains were a hotbed of this type of criminal activity, with the mountains criss-crossed by smuggling routes into Luchese and Bolognese territory. For example, on one single day in September 1560, eight individuals and one group of men were found in exactly the same far-flung location, at the bridge of Pupiglio, smuggling grain out of the Florentine territory towards Lucca on horses and donkeys. ASF, Ufficiali del biado poi magistrato del abbondanza, 107, letters 28 and 29.

59. While the business of the Pratica Segreta continued in a steady flow throughout the year, the nature of that business changed. In 1538/39 the Pratica Segreta recorded four entries for the month of January, none for February, three for March, four for April, one for May, none for June, eight for July, and ten for August.

absent.⁶⁰ Instead, the officials of the Pratica were predominantly preoccupied with consolidation: putting their records in order and chasing up outstanding fines for broken peace agreements, debts, and unpaid taxes.⁶¹

In the months of March and April, the Pratica Segreta appeared to move into action, issuing decrees preventing the congregation of groups of armed men.⁶² While the wording of these decrees is relatively standard and they are easy to ignore as examples of very similar decrees published in various parts of the territory, their timing is significant. The return of the shepherds after a long, harsh winter of absence must have been a cause of great celebration for the mountain communities of Pistoia. It signalled an end to the most difficult months of the year, when communities who would have been physically isolated for weeks were reconnected with the rest of the world. Coinciding with Easter preparations, these men were welcomed back into the community through a complex series of formal and informal rituals. Yet, it was also an extremely delicate moment in the calendar. In order to reach home, these transhumant labourers had to traverse long distances, putting themselves and their animals at risk of robbery or attack. For this reason, special provisions were often made to allow these men to travel carrying arms.⁶³ This was usually a privilege reserved for members of the rural militia, or urban citizens who had made the case for their need to be armed in the mountains for self-defense. The problem of carrying arms was a particularly acute one for the mountain territories with such a long history of factional violence and because of the presence of armed brigands and *banditi*. Their return, combined with environmental factors (lengthening days, milder weather, and the need for intensive cultivation of public and

60. Membership of the factions was linked to extended family networks and often formalized in the electoral structure of mountain communities. See, for example, the division of men from the community of Calamecca into two separate electoral bags depending on their factional loyalties. ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 1, fol. 64r.

61. See for example ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, fols. 45–47r listing tax obligations of the mountain communities by recording the presence of mills, bakeries, taverns, butchers, etc., in each.

62. ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, 22 March 1539, 27r. Similar *bandi* can be found at the same time of year outside of the time period in question: e.g., the 1545 *bando*, *Pratica Segreta*, 4, 50v.

63. Individuals would apply to the captain of the mountain for permission to carry arms for their own protection. See for example the request from Giomo e Giovanni di Duccio, Biondo di Nanni, and Cristofano da Andrea, all from Lizzano, asking to bear arms, arguing they were particularly at risk because of a disagreement they had with certain exiles. ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, fol. 127r. There are dozens of similar examples to be found in ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 4.

private land), meant that there was a dramatic increase in opportunities for social interaction at this time of year, as communities emerged from their winter hibernation. It was probably unsurprising, then, that the Pratica Segreta felt the need to issue repeated *bande* preventing gatherings of armed men and stipulating penalties of up to 300 scudi if they were not respected. Where we might otherwise have ignored these decrees, we would have missed something all too evident to urban administrators: that spring heralded not only a new spiritual beginning and the reanimation of the agricultural calendar, but also a period of increased risk for violent outbreaks in this part of the territory.

These official concerns about the increased risk of violence appear to have been justified, and as we continue to observe the business of the Pratica Segreta across its annual cycle, there is a notable increase in inter- and intra-village conflict during the months from March to June.⁶⁴ The majority of this conflict involves minor outbreaks of violence or damage to property, such as the violent scuffle that took place in a mountain tavern in early March 1539, resulting in a six-month banishment for those responsible; the home invasion and attempted rape of Alessandra by Clemenzino da Cutigliano in May; and an accusation of a plot by six men of the Cancelliere faction to murder an equal number from the Panciaticchi faction in June.⁶⁵ Whether these types of crimes were actually more common during these periods is unknown, but we can assume that communities and officials were particularly attuned to them because of the increased level of activity that went along with this moment in the agricultural calendar and the heightened risk to livelihood that went hand in hand with property damage at this time of year. A harvest could be ruined before it had even begun to mature by animals running unchecked in fields, and forests could be cut off in the prime stages of their regeneration if wood was cut at the wrong time of year.

During the months of July and August, the warmest of the year, the records of the Pratica Segreta indicate that cases of relatively minor property damage gave way to episodes of larger scale and potentially more organized violence, such as those observed in Cohn's study of earlier centuries. Over the period of our case study, the most dramatic of these was a violent tumult centred on Pistoia and involving men from the mountain villages near Sambuca. The

64. This pattern would need to be systematically quantified over a longer period of time to be statistically significant.

65. ASE, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, 26r, 130v, 137v.

incident took place during the final days of July in 1539, when a group of armed rebels, including a large number from the village of Treppio, together with others from Agliana and a large number from the neighbouring Bolognese territory, climbed the walls and broke down the gate.⁶⁶ Once inside, these men went on a rampage, looting houses and shops, resulting in significant damage and multiple homicides. Within days, a list of thirty of those men responsible was published with prices put on their heads ranging from 150 to 300 scudi. Despite the speed of their initial response, the authorities soon discovered that it was not necessarily easy to find men who did not want to be found, and many had literally vanished into the mountains. It took years for many of the perpetrators to be found and put to justice, and a significant number appeared to have escaped their sentences altogether.⁶⁷ As is the case with the previous examples that have been discussed in this paper, it would be easy to categorize this event as just another violent outburst in a long list of factional disputes. However, the timing of the tumult, and the success of the men responsible in evading capture, means that it is highly unlikely that this event was the result of spontaneous action but was instead the culmination of significant planning and organization undertaken by a network of men operating across a large geographical area, including a formal territorial border.

While we have chosen to focus on dramatic moments of conflict, more prosaic aspects of territorial control and local administration were also determined by seasonal rhythms. The payment of taxes and levies is an obvious example of this, as are the extensive public works programs that took place throughout the countryside to maintain bridges, streams, and roads. Local governments organized their elections, meetings, and regulatory interventions according to seasonal rhythms, responding dynamically to the changing environment. A revision of the statutes of Cutigliano in 1604 noted that many people from outside the local community would descend on the area from August onwards to harvest chestnuts and cut wood in preparation for the colder months. As a result, the community introduced a new tax to be applied to those people staying in the area at this time of year, but whose normal place of residence was outside of the commune.⁶⁸

66. ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, fols. 35r–37v.

67. A death sentence was carried out on 26 May of the following year, and references to the prosecution of *banditi* connected to this event appear in the records as late as 1542: ASF, *Pratica Segreta*, 3, fol. 126v.

68. ASF, *Statuti*, 296, 16r.

Seasonal rhythms have defined the daily experiences of rural communities throughout the centuries; perhaps because of this, their impact on patterns of social, political, and religious trends have been largely invisible in the historiography of the period. Our aim in this article has been to “denaturalize” the seasons and locate them within critical historical inquiry while tracing their appearance in records across the medieval/early modern divide. Exploring the impact of the seasons on patterns of behaviour and sociability in premodern rural communities, as well as on the relationship between rural inhabitants (male and female) and urban authorities, also allows us to ask new questions of well-known source material. Finally, our work reinforces a much-needed view of the resilience and agency of rural people in the premodern period. While these patterns need to be tested more rigorously, in multiple geographical zones and historical periods, we hope that our preliminary offering on this topic will stimulate researchers of medieval and early modern Italy to take pause and apply a seasonal lens to their interpretation of sources.