

to him, when the seas rise up high, is voiding his poison, sending it forth to be added to the poison in the air, and that air spreads gradually from place to place and enters men through the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, pores and the other orifices. Then if the man has a strong constitution, nature can expel the poison through ulcers, and if the ulcers putrify, are strangled and fully run their course the patient will be saved, as can be clearly seen. But if the poison should be stronger than his nature, so that his constitution cannot prevail against it, then the poison instantly lays siege to the heart, and the patient dies within a short time, without the relief which comes from the formation of ulcers.

To the third question I say that during the pestilence everyone over seven should be made to vomit daily from an empty stomach, and twice a week, or more often if necessary, he should lie well wrapped up in a warm bed and drink warm ale with ginger so that he sweats copiously, and he should never touch the sheets after that until they have been cleansed of the sweat, for if the person sweating had been in contact with the pestilence a healthy man could catch the plague from the sheets unless they have been well washed. And as soon as he feels an itch or prickling in his flesh he must use a goblet or cupping horn to let blood and draw down the blood from the heart, and this should be done two or three times at intervals of one or two days at most.³⁶ And if he should feel himself oppressed deep within the body, then he should let blood in the nearest veins, either in the arms or in the main veins of the feet. Likewise something which is extremely poisonous in itself may be of service in excluding the plague. And if a healthy adult does as I have described, they can save themselves whenever a great pestilence occurs.

64. Ordinances against the spread of plague, Pistoia, 1348

These are the fullest extant civic ordinances, and are particularly interesting in that they show the city rethinking and amending its strategy as the plague developed. The sections translated below are primarily concerned with preventing the spread of infection. A fourth set of ordinances, not printed here, addresses the problem of providing for the defence of the city given the much reduced population. The translation omits the preambles and the

³⁶ Cupping involved placing heated cups, or special cupping horns, mouth downwards on the skin. As the air inside cooled and contracted the suction it created was thought to draw bad humours to the surface of the skin, where they could more easily be removed by bleeding or some other method.

concluding formalities of each set of ordinances, and also slightly abbreviates the text by reducing some of the formalities and repetitions. In particular note that references to Pistoia and other cities always include the *contado* (the adjoining countryside over which the town ruled) and district as well as the city itself, and that the penalties are to be levied on each offender for every breach of the ordinances.

A. Chiappelli (ed), *Gli Ordinamenti Sanitari del Comune di Pistoia contro la Pestilenza del 1348*, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, series 4, XX, 1887, pp. 8-22.

[2 May, 1348]

1. So that the sickness which is now threatening the region around Pistoia shall be prevented from taking hold of the citizens of Pistoia, no citizen or resident of Pistoia, wherever they are from or of what condition, status or standing they may be, shall dare or presume to go to Pisa or Lucca; and no one shall come to Pistoia from those places, penalty 500 pence. And no one from Pistoia shall receive or give hospitality to people who have come from those places; same penalty. And the guards who keep the gates of the city of Pistoia shall not permit anyone travelling to the city from Pisa or Lucca to enter; penalty 10 pence from each of the guards responsible for the gate through which such an entry has been made. But citizens of Pistoia now living within the city may go to Pisa and Lucca, and return again, if they first obtain permission from the common council — who will vote on the merits of the case presented to them. The licence is to be drawn up by the notary of the *anziani* and gonfalonier of the city.³⁷ And this ordinance is to be upheld and observed from the day of its ratification until 1 October, or longer if the council sees fit.

2. No one, whether from Pistoia or elsewhere, shall dare or presume to bring or fetch to Pistoia, whether in person or by an agent, any old linen or woollen cloths, for male or female clothing or for bedspreads; penalty 200 pence, and the cloth to be burnt in the public piazza of Pistoia by the official who discovered it.³⁸ However it shall be lawful

³⁷ The official rulers of Italian cities were the *commune* (a word which does not have its modern egalitarian connotations). They appointed a *podestà*, often a nobleman from outside the region, as their salaried chief executive. By the fourteenth century this arrangement was mirrored in many cities by the more broadly based *popolo*, represented by a governing council of *anziani* (elders). The *capitano del popolo* corresponded, in background and role, to the *podestà* of the commune.

³⁸ Later outbreaks of plague in Italian cities were often associated with the movement of cloth, and this requirement suggests that the connection may already have been noted. Contemporaries — who were not aware of the role played by flies in the transmission of the disease — explained the connection as due to the trapping of corrupt air within the folds of fabric.

for citizens of Pistoia travelling within Pistoia and its territories to take linen and woollen cloths with them for their own use or wear, provided that they are in a pack or fardle weighing 50 lb or less. And this ordinance to be upheld and observed from the day of its ratification until 1 January. And if such cloth has already been brought into Pistoia, the bringer must take it away within three days of the ordinance's ratification; same penalty.

3. The bodies of the dead shall not be removed from the place of death until they have been enclosed in a wooden box, and the lid of planks nailed down³⁹ so that no stench can escape, and covered with no more than one pall, coverlet or cloth; penalty 50 pence to be paid by the heirs of the deceased or, if there are no heirs, by the nearest kinsmen in the male line. The goods of the deceased are to stand as surety for the payment of the penalty. Also the bodies are to be carried to burial in the same box; same penalty. So that the civic officials can keep a check on this, the rectors of the chapels in Pistoia must notify the *podestà* and *capitano* when a corpse is brought into their chapel, giving the dead man's name and the *contrada* in which he was living when he died; same penalty. As soon as he has been notified, the *podestà* or *capitano* must send an official to the place, to find out whether this chapter of the ordinances is being observed, along with the other regulations governing funerals, and to punish those found guilty. And if the *podestà* or *capitano* is remiss in carrying out these orders he must be punished by those who appointed him; same penalty. But these regulations should not apply to the poor and destitute of the city, who are dealt with under another civic ordinance.

4. To avoid the foul stench which comes from dead bodies each grave shall be dug two and a half arm-length deep, as this is reckoned in Pistoia;⁴⁰ penalty 10 pence from anyone digging or ordering the digging of a grave which infringes the statute.

5. No one, of whatever condition, status or standing, shall dare or presume to bring a corpse into the city, whether confined or not; penalty 25 pence. And the guards at the gates shall not allow such bodies to be brought into the city; same penalty, to be paid by every guard responsible for the gate through which the body was brought.

³⁹ The bodies of ordinary people were generally buried in shrouds, although they might be carried to church in a coffin. This ordinance probably implies that they were to be buried in a coffin, as people certainly had to be in Tournai [61].

⁴⁰ A *braccio* in Pistoia measured between two and two and a half feet.

6. Any person attending a funeral shall not accompany the corpse or its kinsmen further than the door of the church where the burial is to take place, or go back to the house where the deceased lived, or to any other house on that occasion; penalty 10 pence. Nor is he to go the week's mind of the deceased; same penalty.⁴¹

7. When someone dies, no one shall dare or presume to give or send any gift to the house of the deceased, or to any other place on that occasion, either before or after the funeral, or to visit the house, or eat there on that occasion; penalty 25 pence. This shall not apply to the sons and daughters of the deceased, his blood brothers and sisters and their children, or to his grandchildren. The *podestà* and *capitano*, when notified by the rector as in chapter 3, must send an official to enquire whether anything has been done to the contrary and to punish those responsible.

8. To avoid waste and unnecessary expense, no one shall dare or presume to wear new clothes during the mourning period or for the next eight days; penalty 25 pence. This shall not apply to the wife of the deceased, who may if she wishes wear a new garment of any fabric without penalty.

9. No crier, summoner or drummer of Pistoia shall dare or presume to invite or summon any citizen of Pistoia, whether publicly or privately, to come to a funeral or visit the corpse; nor shall anyone send the same summoner, trumpeter, crier or drummer; penalty 10 pence from each crier, trumpeter, summoner or drummer, and from the people by whom they have been employed.

10. So that the sound of bells does not trouble or frighten the sick, the keepers of the campanile of the cathedral church of Pistoia shall not allow any of the bells to be rung during funerals, and no one else shall dare or presume to ring any of the bells on such occasions; penalty 10 pence, to be paid by the keepers who allowed the bells to be rung and by the heirs of the dead man, or his kinsmen should he have no heirs. When a parishioner is buried in his parish church, or a member of a fraternity within the fraternity church, the church bells may be rung, but only on one occasion and not excessively; same penalty.

11. No one shall presume or dare to summon a gathering of people to escort a widow from the house of her dead husband, but only from the

⁴¹ This last sentence refers to a ban on attendance at the commemorative mass one week after a death.

church to his burial place. But it shall be lawful for the widow's kinsmen to send up to four women to escort the widow from her husband's house at other times. No one shall dare to attend such a gathering; penalty 25 pence, paid by those invited and by those who issued the invitation.

12. No one shall dare or presume to raise a lament or crying for anyone who has died outside Pistoia, or summon a gathering of people other than the kinsfolk and spouse of the deceased, or have bells rung, or use criers or any other means to invite people throughout the city to such a gathering; penalty 25 pence from each person involved.

However it is to be understood that none of this applies to the burial of knights, doctors of law, judges, and doctors of physic, whose bodies can be honoured by their heirs at their burial in any way they please.

13. So that the living are not made ill by rotten and corrupt food, no butcher or retailer of meat shall dare or presume to hang up meat, or keep and sell meat hung up in their storehouse or over their counter; penalty 10d.⁴² And that the rulers of the craft of butchery must investigate these matters on every day when slaughtering occurs, and immediately denounce any offenders to the lords, *podestà* or *capitano*, or to one of their officials; same penalty from the rulers of the craft if they fail to carry out these things in person or by deputy. The *podestà* and *capitano* must each send someone to look into these matters, and punish those found guilty, along with the rulers of the craft if they have failed to denounce them. The word of any official who finds an infringement of the regulations shall be taken as sufficient evidence.

14. Butchers and retailers of meat shall not stable horses or allow any mud or dung in the shop or other place where they sell meat, or in or near their storehouse, or on the roadway outside; nor shall they slaughter animals in a stable, or keep flayed carcasses in a stable or in any other place where there is dung; penalty 10 pence. An official of the *podestà* or *capitano* is to enquire closely into such matters, and his word is to be taken on any infringement of these ordinances.

15. No butcher or retailer of meat shall dare or presume to keep on the counter where he sells meat, meat from more than one ox, calf, or cow

⁴² The word I have translated as 'to hang up' is *gonfiare* which, in modern Italian, means to swell or blow up. This might suggest that butchers were being forbidden to sell carcasses already distended by the gases generated by corruption, but the phrasing seems to suggest that it is the display of carcasses which is being banned. Perhaps both implications are present: that to minimise the risk of corruption whole carcasses are not to be displayed, but only joints of meat.

at once, although he can keep the meat of an ox or cow alongside that of a calf; penalty 10 pence. The rulers of the craft must investigate the matter on every day on which animals are slaughtered, and denounce any offenders to the *podestà* or *capitano* of the city; same penalty.

16. In May, June, July and August butchers and retailers of meat shall slaughter meat on the days on which meat can be eaten, including Sundays and feast days, and sell it on the same day to those wishing to buy; the animals to be vetted by the civic officials appointed for the purpose.⁴³

17. No butcher or retailer shall dare or presume to kill any ox, cow or calf without first obtaining permission from officials of the *podestà* or *capitano*. As soon as the official's approval has been requested he shall go and see the animal, to decide whether it is healthy or not. When permission has been given the butcher himself must slaughter the animal properly in the official's presence; penalty 10 pence.

18. No butcher or any other retailer of meat shall kill any two- or three-year old boar or sow between 1 March and 1 December; penalty 25 pence.

19. Butchers or retailers shall flay every two- or three-year old boar or sow killed between 1 December and 1 March before putting it on sale. If they wish to salt it down, that is permissible, but it must be flayed first; penalty 25 pence.

20. [Provisions for the election of officials to set the retail price of meat.]

21. For the better preservation of health, there should be a ban on all kinds of poultry, calves, foodstuffs and on all kinds of fat being taken out of Pistoia by anybody; penalty 100 pence and the confiscation of the things being carried contrary to the ban. And whoever can capture such carriers and the things carried, and take them to the goal of the commune of Pistoia shall have half of the fine and of the value of the goods, after the fine has been paid and the goods sold to the highest bidder.

22. To avoid harm to men by sink and corruption, there shall in future be no tanning of skins within the city walls of Pistoia; penalty 25 pence.

23. [Provisions for enforcement including the proviso that anyone can

⁴³ In other words, the importance of ensuring a supply of fresh meat meant that slaughtering could take place on days when it was usually banned.

denounce an offender before the *podestà* or *capitano*, and receive a quarter of the fine if the accusation is upheld; the word of one man worthy of belief is to be sufficient evidence of guilt, or the statements of four men testifying to the common belief.]

[Revisions of 23 May]

Chapter 1 to be entirely revoked.

Chapter 19 to continue: After the pigs have been shaved or singed the butcher or retailer must flay them before taking them to his home or storeroom; once flayed it is permissible for him to take the carcasses into his storeroom or house, but otherwise not; penalty as specified in chapter 19.

Chapter 21 to be entirely revoked and replaced with: There should be a ban on all kinds of poultry, goats and sheep, and no one shall take them or cause them to be taken out of the contado of Pistoia; penalty 5 pence, to be put to the common use by the *podestà* or *capitano*. And anyone who is able to capture someone doing the contrary, and deliver them to the gaol of the commune of Pistoia shall have half the penalty.

Chapter 22 to be amended by the addition of: That skimmers and tanners shall be allowed to tan skins as at present in their tanneries from the day on which these ordinances are ratified until 15 June. Moreover tanneries shall be permitted within the walls of the city, but only in the following places: in the houses along the road which goes from the house of the canons of Pistoia at the chapel of Santa Maria del Nuova to the gate of San Pietro, and in that contrado, and on the land outside the gate. And in those places they may peg out skins and do everything else necessary to tanning, as they wish. And this may also be done below the Castell Traiecti up to the Carmelite friary and in the houses, gardens and grounds round about. And if anyone does the contrary, let him be punished or fined as in the said chapter.

It is also provided and ordained that

24. So that no corruption or stretch should harm people's bodies, within the city the rendering down of dripping or suet should be done in houses at least 25 arms length from their neighbours and nowhere else; penalty 25 pence.

25. That the tanning of gut, to make strings, shall only be done outside the city; penalty 25 pence.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Animal entrails were tanned and twisted ('spun') to form various types of cord, including the strings for musical instruments and tennis rackets. The generic term

[26-28 Three chapters regulating the meat trade in the city and region.]

29. The *podestà* and *capitano* shall make enquiry into all the matters contained here, and also act on accusations and denunciations made by anyone else before them, and punish and fine offenders as set out above.

[Revisions of 4 June]

30. At the burial of anyone no bell is to be rung at all, but people are to be summoned and their prayers invited only by word of mouth; penalty 25 pence from the heirs or next of kin of the deceased.

31. When the corpse has been carried to the church, everyone who accompanied it there ought to withdraw, and when the next of kin leave no one ought to accompany them except their spouses and the neighbours, and also the dead man's next of kin on his mother's side. These people may go to the house of the dead man, or wherever the body is, but may not enter the building. 'Neighbours' are to be understood as people who lived within 50 arms length of the dead man during his lifetime; penalty 25 pence.

32. The *anziani* and *gonfalonieri* shall choose at least sixteen men from each quarter of the city, and repeat the process as often as seems necessary to maintain the number. These men are to take corpses from houses or dwellings and carry them to church and to burial, and no one else shall dare to enter a house or other place in which a person has died or carry the body to burial; penalty 25 pence. And anybody who asks someone else to remove or carry a corpse shall incur the same penalty. Those who carry the corpse shall have 16 pence between them for their labour, the money to be paid from public funds; and the chamberlains of the commune of Pistoia shall make the payment within two days of the burial; penalty 25 pence. A written receipt from one of the brethren of the place where the burial occurred, or from a priest or one of the keepers of the fabric of the church where the burial took place, or from the rector of the hospital if the burial was at a hospital, is to be taken as sufficient proof that the portering was carried out. And it shall be sufficient for the receipt to say: I, N, have written this. The men chosen and appointed to act as porters must go

for the product was catgut, although cats were not, in fact, the source of most of the gut used. As this regulation implies, the process was thought more noxious than the tanning of skins, which could still be carried out within the city walls during the plague.

when anybody asks them, and if they refuse they are to be punished with a fine of 10 pence. An oath on the sacrament by the person who made the request is to be taken as sufficient proof of their refusal.

However, the *disciplinati*⁴⁵ of a particular society in the city, who wear the garments of *disciplinati*, shall be allowed to remove and carry the bodies of the dead if this is done without charge, for the good of their souls; for certain good men, in search of salvation, have made themselves porters of the bodies of the poor and destitute, and they shall be allowed to enter houses and other places and take the bodies to burial whenever they wish.

33. Since wax for honouring the corpses of the dead cannot be found on sale, candles are not to be given, but instead it shall be permissible for anyone to give between 6 and 12 pence, at most, as he sees fit to each priest and friar who attends a funeral, in lieu of the candles and money which they were accustomed to give. But canons of the great church of Pistoia, prebendaries, priors, wardens and provosts of churches and of the orders of friars of Pistoia may be given twice that amount, penalty 25 pence.

34. The keepers of the fabric of each church in the city shall keep a supply of wax torches to be carried at the burial and to be held, alight, while the corpse is buried. And no other torches or wax lights should be held or carried at a burial: penalty 25 pence. And after the burial the torches shall be taken back and restored to the keepers, and they shall be reimbursed at the going rate for the wax used, with an additional 5 pence for the good of the dead person's soul.

35. For the support of the church where burial takes place, and of the rector of the church where the dead man was a parishoner, when the burial is in a friary church the friars should be given between 16 and 20 pence in lieu of candles, and the same should be given to the rector of the church where the dead man was a parishoner. And if he is buried in his parish church, the rector should be given the same amount, and so should the keepers of the fabric. However, it shall be left to the discretion of the friars, rectors and keepers of the fabric to take less from the poor and destitute, depending on the status of the deceased.

36. [The *podestà* and *capitano* and their officials should enquire into these matters weekly and punish those doing the contrary; penalty 50 pence. Anyone can bring an accusation before them.]

⁴⁵ *Disciplinati* were members of a penitential fraternity; in this case, those who had taken on the role of burying the dead.

These ordinances are to be observed until 1 September, or until 1 November at the discretion of the *anziani* and gonfalonier. Saving that anything in them which is contrary to the liberty of the church shall be null and void, and of no effect.

65. Plague regulations of Bernabò Visconti, lord of Milan, 1374
Chronicon Regense, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum italicarum Scriptores* XVIII, Milan, 1751, col. 82.

Wishing, as far as we can, to preserve our subjects from contagious illness, we have made certain decrees which we send to you enclosed in this, and which we wish to be observed in Reggio and to be enrolled in the volume of our statutes. Milan, 17 January 1374.

To the noble man, the *podestà* of Reggio. We wish that each person who displays a swelling or tumour shall immediately leave the city, castle or town where he is and take to the open country, living either in huts or in the woods, until he either dies or recovers.

Item, those in attendance upon someone who died shall wait ten days before returning to human society.

Item, parish priests shall examine the sick to see what the illness is, and shall immediately notify the designated searchers under pain of being burnt alive.

Item, all the goods, both movable and immovable, shall be put to the use of the lord's treasury.

Item, the goods of anyone who carries the epidemic from another place shall likewise be put to the use of the lord's treasury, and no restitution shall be made.

Item, under pain of forfeiture and death no one shall enter service from attending upon the sick, except as above.

Let all our subjects be informed of these matters.

66. London butchery regulations, 1371

This attempt to ban the dumping of entrails and blood within the city of London is justified in terms of the diseases which arise from corrupt air, and was presumably a deliberate attempt to play upon public anxieties about the plague. It was not, however, a serious attempt to prevent the spread of disease — and two major city shambles were almost immediately exempted from its