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Guidoboni E. e Comastri A., *Catalogue of earthquakes and tsunamis in the Mediterranean area from the 11th to the 15th century*. Roma-Bologna 2005

< 173 > **1328 December 4 Valnerina [central Italy]**

- sources 1 [manuscripts] JNULJerusalem, Heb.8.o 4281, Moses ben Daniel, *Book of Prayers*, 1391, fol.389v.; Bonav. Benv., *Cron.*, p.25; *Ann. Arretin. min.*, p.44; Villani G., *Nuova cron.*, II, p.663; Giov. Bazz., *Chron.*, p.98; *Ann. e cron. Perugia*, p.221
- sources 2 BNCFlorence, *Magliabechiano*, VIII, 1488, *Ricordi*, fol.95r.; BAVat., *Barb. Lat.*, 324 [Paolo Rocchi], *Terraemotus...* 1599; BAVat., *Vat. Lat.*, 7934 [Paolo Rocchi], *Narratio Terraemotus...* 1599; Mar. Moro, *Mem.*, p.80; *Cron. sen. magg.*, p.482; Nicolò Ferr., *Polyhist.*, col.749; *Cron. Varign.*, II, p.410; *Cron. città di Perugia*, p.101; Ghirardacci (1596-1657), II, p.87
- historiography Pellini (ed. 1664); Muratori (1762-64); Baglivi (1754); Moroni (1840-79); Patrizi-Forti (1869); Conti (1872); Sansi (1879-84); Franceschini (1913); Grohmann (1981); Cordella (1995)
- literature Busi (1995); Castelli *et al.* (1997); Boschi *et al.* (1998)
- catalogues d. Bonito (1691); von Hoff (1840); Perrey (1848); Mallet (1853); Mercalli (1883); Taramelli (1896); Baratta (1899, 1901); Milne (1911); \*Conversini *et al.* (1990); \*Boschi *et al.* (1995, 1997, 2000)
- catalogues p. Giorgetti and Iaccarino (1971); Carrozzo *et al.* (1973); Postpischl (1985); CPTI (1999)

The earthquake of 4 December 1328 occurred towards dawn, that is to say at about 6:15 UT, and it struck the territory of the Duchy of Spoleto and the *Marca* of Ancona, which now form part of the Marche and Umbria regions. The most serious damage affected the hilly area to the west of the Sibillini Mountains, in the valley of the river Nera.

Particularly serious damage occurred at Norcia, where houses, towers, part of the town walls, *palazzi* and churches collapsed. There were very serious collapses at Montesanto and Preci, and all the inhabitants of the latter place were killed. At Castel San Giovanni, the earthquake destroyed (*dirupavit*) most of the houses and other buildings; parts of Cerreto di Spoleto and Monte San Martino collapsed (all the above places are in the present-day province of Perugia), as did part of Visso (in the province of Macerata). Spoleto was also affected, many houses collapsing there (*corruerunt*). The earthquake was strongly felt at Ripatransone (in the province of Ascoli Piceno), where house walls and the floors shook violently. The earthquake was felt at Foligno and in Rome.

The earthquake is recorded in various reliable sources, two of which were written by eye-witnesses. These are the chronicle of Bonaventura di Benvenuto, a notary who lived at Foligno in the late 13th and the first half of the 14th century, and a long mem-

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oir in Hebrew to be found in a book of prayers by Moses ben Daniel, a member of the Jewish community in the ancient town of Ripatransone (called *La Ripa* in the text), situated in the *Marca* of Ancona. The manuscript is in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. It tells of the effects of the earthquake at Ripatransone, and records the first reports to reach there of the serious destruction at Norcia. These reports were confirmed at a later stage by refugees from Norcia who sought safety at Ripatransone; and the author of the manuscript later went to Norcia himself, obtaining personal confirmation of what he had been told.

These two sources enable us to date the earthquake accurately, for Bonaventura di Benvenuto tells us that the shocks began on 4 December 1328, towards dawn (*circa auroram*), and this agrees with Moses ben Daniel's comment that he first noticed shaking in the early morning, shortly before sunrise. This makes it possible for us to correct the date of the earthquake, which is given as 1 December 1328 in Postpischl (1985) on the basis of Baratta (1901), who follows Baglivi (1754).

Bonaventura di Benvenuto writes:

"1328 [...] and in the following month of December, there were many earthquakes, which caused great harm to the people of Norcia, and they began on the fourth day of that month towards dawn, and lasted for months".

*MCCCXXVIII. [...] et de mense decembris sequentis fuerunt multi terremotus, ex quibus Nursini magnum receperunt dampnum, et inceperunt die quarta dicti mensis de mane circa auroram et duraverunt per menses.*

Moses ben Daniel's text records:

"A great earthquake the like of which has not happened since the days of Uzziah king of Judah

On the first day of the month of Tevet, the year 5089 of the Creation [4 December 1328], and we were in the city of La Ripa in the province of the *Marca* and there was a great earthquake soon after dawn. 'And the foundations of the walls shook' [Isaiah 6, 4] from the heaviness of the earthquake, and the floor of the house shook like a hut, the barrels moved in the cellar and hit one another and the wine inside them resounded like a bell. And I was lying on my bed because the east had not yet lightened. The strength of the earthquake that day affected an area greater than three miles. That day the earthquake was felt strongly in Norcia in the province of the Duchy near Spoleto and we were told that a griveous thing came to pass that houses have fallen and courtyards were destroyed and there was a great killing when the towers collapsed and there was a great disturbance among the people everywhere. There were many dead bodies and there was no end to the corpses 'Through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts the land is burned' [Isaiah 9, 19] and from that earthquake seven souls died from among the Jews, five of them the sons of the same mother, 'She who bore seven has languished; she has swooned away' [Jeremiah 15, 9] and one son escaped for being in Rome and a daughter they took out of the ruins. And in those days people came from Norcia that was turned upside down in an instant, and they told us what their eyes had seen, that the houses fell down and the courtyards were destroyed and even the city wall was partly destroyed. In short, no house remained standing in the city due to the strength of the earthquake. And there is no house that does not have a dead person. And at that time the number of victims became known and there were more than two thousand souls among the men, the children and the women, and only few young boys and girls remained, for some of the men and the women ran away [from their houses] completely naked. On that day and at that hour there as a great earthquake in all the cities of the *Marca* and Duchy and in Rome and possibly in all the world. And on that day houses fell in other known cities. Later I came to Norcia and it was just as I have heard. After that the survivors got up and rebuilt the city and constructed houses and settled in them and put up the city's ruins, restoring

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them to better condition than they had been in days of old. And those were the days of 'misericordia' among the gentiles who are going about crying and weeping, bare shouldered and scourging themselves, and their children walking beside them, crying loudly, and the rain and snow fell upon them from the sky as it is the autumn season. And the snow was about two *ammis* [80 centimetres] high on the ground and the weather is growing stormy. After that many days of quakes, 'praise is due to Him for silence, glory' [Psalms, 65, 2]. And that was the year 89 of the sixth millennium under the sign 'In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land' [Ruth 1, 1] as there was famine everywhere, in the Marche and Lo Ducato and the kingdom of Puglia.

[intercalated with the writing on the margins] In Rome and in the [lands of] Patrimony [of St.Peter] and in the kingdom of Puglia there is a great and terrible famine the such has not been seen since the days of our forefathers. And in the year '90 of the sixth millenium [1329] the famine spread and it caused the "dogale" of the vicar at Rome (the pope) to reach nine [...] and it was found with great difficulty [...] in some cities of the *Marcha* about nine [...] and in the Duchy and the kingdom[...] [end of intercalation] and the kingdom of Puglia the cost was high and in the city of Viterbo it cost much because an army of the Romans came there and some of its people left it because of the heavy famine and in those days it was written that a thousand and four hundred people of Viterbo died in Santo Spirito of Rome alone. And in all cities we know about there was a great famine. And there never was the like of that quake and that famine 'The Lord became jealous for his people and had pity on its poverty' [phrased on Joel 2, 18]. Praise the terrible king who has the force and the might and He shall be a refuge to his people and a hiding place as it is said 'the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel' [Joel 3, 16]. Amen".

רעש גדול מאד אשר כמוהו לא נהיה מימי עוזיה מלך יהודה באחד בשבת בראש חודש טבת שנת הפ"ט ליצירה ואנחנו בכרך לריפא אשר בגלילות המרקא ויהי רעש גדול תכף לעלות השחר וינועו אמות [ישעיה ו, ד] הקירות מכובד הרעש וקרקה הבית התנועע כמלונה חביות המרתף דא לדא נקשן היין מקשקש בתוכם כפעמון ואני הייתי שוכב על מטתי כי עדיין לא האיר המזרח ושיעור הרעש היה כשיעור מהלך שלישי מיל ביום ההוא עצם הרעש בכרך נורשי אשר בגליל הדוקטו קרובה לאספוליטי וחזות קשה הוגד לנו כי נפלו הבתים ונהרסו החצירות והיה הרג גדול בנפול המגדלים והיתה מהומה גדולה בעם רב הפגר בכל מקום אין קצה לגויה "בעברת ה' צבאות נעתם ארץ" [ישעיה ט, יח] ומהו מן הרעש ההוא בבית אחת שבע נפשות מהיהודים, החמש מהם בני אם אחת, "אומללה יולדת השבעה נפחה נפשה" [ירמיה טו, ט] ונמלט לה בן אחד שהיה לה ברומא ובת אחת שהוצאה מתחת המפולת. בימים ההם באו אנשים מכרך נורשי ההפוכה כמו רגע ויגידו לנו את אשר ראו עיניהם כי נפלו הבתים ונהרסו החצירות וגם חזמת העיר נפלה קצתה סוף דבר לא נשאר בעיר בית אשר לא נהרס מכובד הרעש ואין בית אשר אין שם מת. בעת ההיא בא מספר ההרוגים והיו יותר מאלפים נפש בין הגברים והטף והנשים, ולא נותרו שם ילדים וילדות כי אם מתי מספר כי מקצת הגברים והנשים נסו חוצה עירום ועריה ביום ההוא ובשעה ההיא נהיה הרעש בכלל בכל ערי המרקא והדוקטו וגם ברומא ואיפשר כי היה כללי בכל העולם. גם נפלו מן הבתים ביום ההוא בארצות ידועות. אחרי כן הייתי בנורשא וכאשר שמעתי כן ראיתי אחרי כן קמו השרידים ובנו העיר על תילה ובנו בתים וישבו הריסותיה הקימו ותיקנום יותר מאשר היו מימי קדם בימים ההם נעשית המיסריקורדיי בין הערילים הולכים וצועקים ובוכים תלושי כתף ומכים על מתניהם גם טפיהם ילך עמהם הלך וגעוה והגשם והשלג יורד עליהם מן השמים כי אז זמן הסתיו והשלג כאמתים על פני הארץ כי הזמן הולך וסוער עליהם אחר כן ימים רבים ברעשים יתב' "אשר לו דומייה תהלה" [תהלים, סה, ב] השנה ההיא היתה שנת פ"ט לאלף השישי סימנה "ויהי בימי שפ"ט' השופטים ויהי רעב בארץ" [רות א, א] כי היה רעב גדול בכל העולם הן במרקא הן בלו דוקטו [תוספת, שוליים ימין] הן ברומא ופטרימוניאו ובמלכות פולייא רעב גדול כבד מאד אשר כמוהו לא נהיה מימות אבותינו. ויהי בשנת צ' לאלף השישי וירחק הרעב עד היות הדוגלי מן המשנה ברומא כתשעה ליט' ונמצא בקושי גדול וכן מקצת ארצות המרקא כתשעה ליט' וכן בלו דוקטו ובמלכות [סיום התוספת] ובמלכות פולייא היה יותר יקר ובעיר ביטרבו יקר ה... אמנם כי היה שם חיל מן הרומנים ומקצת אנשיה ירדו מתוכה מכובד הרעב. בימים ההם נמצא כתוב כי מתו מן הביטריביסי אלף וארבע מאות בע' ספירטו מרומא לבד ובכל הארצות אשר שמענו שמעם היה רעב גדול יתר מאוד וכרעש ההוא וכרעב ההוא לא נהיה וכמוהו לא יוסיף כי יקנא ה' לעמו ועניו ירחם [ב, יח] יתב' המלך הנורא אשר לו העוז והגבורה והוא יהיה לעמו מחסה וסתרה כאמור וה' מחסה לעמו ומעוז לבני ישראל ...

These two sources were not absorbed into the later historiographical tradition because they did not circulate: the Foligno chronicle because it was linked to a small town, and

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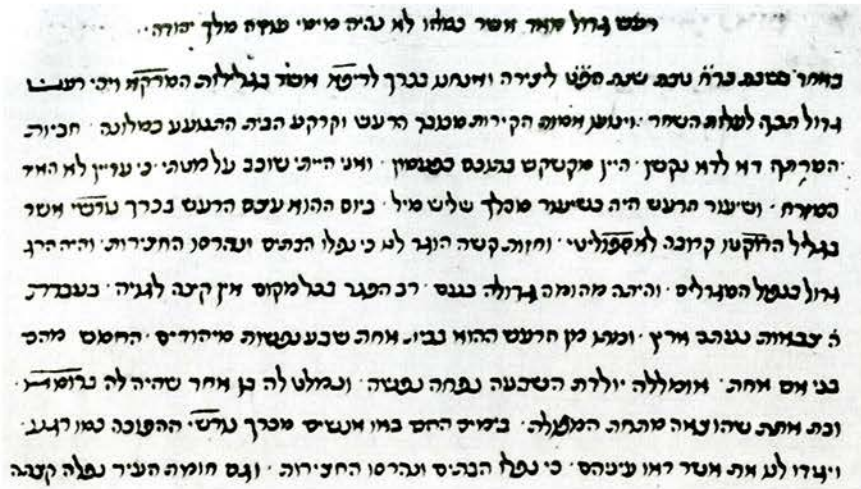


fig. 75 Detail of the *Book of prayers* of Moses ben Daniel (14th c.), containing a record of effects of the earthquake of 1328 at Norcia and Ripatransone (Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem, Heb. 8.o 4281).

the Moses ben Daniel evidence because it was in a private document. But there are reports of the earthquake in other sources of the time, namely the anonymous *Annales Arretinorum Minores*, the chronicle of Giovanni Villani and the *Chronicon Mutinense* by Giovanni da Bazzano (a notary who died about 1363/64). Villani, who died of the plague in 1348, provides us with our richest source of information about this earthquake, and it is to him that we owe the identification of six of the places affected. Villani writes: “How a large part of the town of Norcia in the Duchy [of Spoleto] was reduced to ruins by earthquakes, together with many castles in the surroundings.

In the said year 1328, at the beginning of December, there were various earthquakes in the *Marca* [of Ancona] in the area around Norcia, with the result that something approaching the greater part of the said town of Norcia was reduced to ruins, and the town walls collapsed, together with towers, houses, *palazzi* and churches, and more than 5,000 people died in the disaster, because it was sudden and occurred during the night. And similarly a castle near Norcia, called Le Precchie [Preci], was reduced to ruins, and no person or animal remained alive there; and the same thing happened at the castle of Montesanto, and part of Monte Sammartino, Cerreto and the castle of Visso”.

*Come sobissò per tremuoti gran parte de la città di Norcia del Ducato con più castella ivi intorno. Nel detto anno MCCCXXVIII, a l'entrante di dicembre, furono diversi tremuoti ne la Marca ne le contrade di Norcia, per modo che quasi la maggior parte del la detta città di Norcia sobissò, e caddono le mura del la città e le torri, case, e palazzi, e chiese, e de la detta rovina, perché fu sùbita [improvvisa] e di notte, morirono più di V M persone. E per simile modo rovinò uno castello presso a Norcia, che si chiama le Precchie, che non vi rimase persona né animale vivo; e per simile modo il castello di Montesanto, e parte di Monte Sammartino, e di Cerreto, e del castello di Visso.*

Villani's dating of the earthquake to the beginning of December (*a l'entrante di dicembre, di notte*) is slightly less precise than that of Bonaventura di Benvenuto, mentioned above. The *Annales Arretinorum Minores* and the *Chronicon Mutinense* by Giovanni da Bazzano, who simply dates the earthquake to 1329, provide extra detail by mentioning Spoleto and Castel San Giovanni, which are not recorded by Villani.

The *Annales Arretinorum minores* records:

“1328. [...] Great earthquakes in the month of December, principally at Spoleto, where many houses collapsed and men and animals died”.

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fig. 76

1328. [...] *Terremotus magni de mense decembris et maxime Spoleti, quibus multe domus corruerunt et homines et bestie periere.*

Giovanni da Bazzano writes:

“At that time [1329] there were great earthquakes, with the result that all the houses and other buildings at Norcia in the Duchy were destroyed, and more than 4,000 people died, and it also destroyed many of the houses and other buildings in nearby Castel San Giovanni”.

*Dicto tempore fuerunt terraemotus magni, ita quod terra Norsiae de Ducatu in totum domibus et edificiis fuit dirupata et mortui [sunt] ibidem ultra quatuor milia personarum et eciam Castrum Sancti Iohannis in partibus illis pro magna parte domibus et edificiis dirupavit.*

Information similar to that provided by Villani (it may in fact derive from him) is to be found in the *Polyhistoria* of Nicolò da Ferrara, which was wrongly attributed to Bartolomeo da Ferrara. The links between later sources underline the influence of Giovanni Villani on important urban chronicles of the 14th century, such as the *Cronaca senese detta la cronaca maggiore* (wrongly attributed to Agnolo di Tura del Grasso), and the 15th century, such the Bolognese *Cronaca Varignana*. This influence persists into the historiography of later centuries.

The earthquake is reported in general terms in 14th-16th century vernacular chronicles from Perugia, namely the *Annali e cronaca di Perugia in volgare dal 1191 al 1336*, the *Memorie di Perugia* by Mariano del Moro and the *Cronaca della città di Perugia* known as Graziani's diary. They all provide similar information, mentioning only the town of Norcia by name, and they differ from Villani as to the number of victims, since the figure they give for deaths at Norcia is two thousand (or two hundred, perhaps as a result of manuscript copying errors), whereas Villani gives five thousand — perhaps for the whole area. They thus appear to belong to a separate local tradition. The *Annali e cronaca di Perugia* are written in a somewhat corrupt and dialectal Italian vernacular:

“In this year [1328], in the months of November and December, there were many earthquakes in the lands. Norcia was reduced to ruins as were many other castles and many mountains. And it was said that more than two thousand people died there.

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And [the inhabitants] of many towns and castles went out into the fields for fear of these earthquakes”.

*In quisto millesemo [MCCCXXVij], del mese de novembre e di deciembre, fuoro molte taramuotogle per le contrade. Ennabisòse Norscie e molte altre castelgle e molte montangne; e sì se disse che cie moriero più de doi milia persone. E molte citade e castella usciero a canpo per paura del ditte taramuotogle.*

The 14th century sources differ as to the number of deaths in Norcia and its territory. Moses ben Daniel writes of more than 2,000 dead, and refers specifically to the death of 7 Jews. Giovanni Villani records more than 5,000 victims, Giovanni da Bazzano gives more than 4,000, and the *Annali e cronaca di Perugia* maintain that there were more than 2,000, whereas the later *Cronaca della città di Perugia*, known as Graziani's diary, suggests only 200 (perhaps as a result of errors occurring when the manuscripts were copied). In his *Memorie di Perugia*, Mariano del Moro simply writes that there were many victims. The disagreement as to the number of victims at Norcia may perhaps be partly the result of the sources attributing to the best known town involved the total number of earthquake victims for the whole area. According to Villani, all the inhabitants of Preci died (but the actual number is not specified). According to the *Annales Arretinorum Minores*, there were some deaths at Spoleto as well (but the number is not given). The town of Cascia (in the province of Perugia) is not mentioned in the above sources, but there is an interesting item of information about it in an unpublished report, written in January 1600, concerning the earthquake of November 1599. A local historian named Franceschini (1913) attributes it to Paolo Rocchi, and there are two known copies in the Vatican Library (*Barberiniani Latini*, 324; *Vaticani Latini*, 7934). This report states that the inhabitants of Norcia celebrated the feast of St.Barbara on 4 December to commemorate a violent earthquake which had struck the town 270 years earlier, that is to say about 1329. This is confirmation that the 1328 earthquake was a very important event in the history of the town. The study by Castelli *et al.* (1997, p.22) mentions a parchment preserved in the local history archives at Sellano (*Pergamene*, no.20) which records that on 11 January 1329 the town council of Montesanto (which we know from Villani to have been seriously damaged in the earthquake) met in a house or hut there. This is an indication, perhaps, that the town hall, where the local council as well as that of the neighbouring village of Sellano normally met, was not available. The document also seems to suggest that Sellano either did not possess suitable premises, or did not have any available because it too had been struck by the earthquake.

▲ 1328 12 04 6:15 UT ★ = 42 51 13 01 I<sub>0</sub> = X Me = 6.4 Sites: 12

localities	lat.	long.	I	localities	lat.	long.	I
Montesanto	42 54	12 56	X	Cerreto di Spoleto	42 49	12 55	VIII-IX
Norcia	42 48	13 06	X	Monte San Martino	42 54	13 01	VIII-IX
Preci	42 53	13 02	X	Visso	42 56	13 05	VIII-IX
Cascia	42 43	13 01	IX-X	Ripatransone	43 00	13 46	VI
Castel S.Giovanni	42 41	13 04	IX	Foligno	42 57	12 42	F
Spoleto	42 44	12 44	IX	Rome	41 54	12 29	F