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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

〈 200 〉 **1352 December 25 Sansepolcro [central Italy]**

〈 201 〉 **1353 January 1 Sansepolcro**

sources 1 [manuscripts] ASBo, *Signorie visc., eccl. e bentiv., Riformag.*, III, regg.25-26 (1353); Azario, *Liber*, p.59; Villani M., *Cron.*, I, pp.382-4, 404; Villola, *Chron.*, pp.19-20; Giov. Bazz., *Chron.*, p.152; Battagli, *Marcha*, p.56; Levalossi-Gazata, *Chron.*, cols.71-2; *Ann. Caesen.*, p.187

sources 2 BMedLaur, Florence, Plut. 66.25, *Libellus*, fols.15r., 18r.-v.; BRiccMor, Florence, *Mss. Moreniani*, 277, *Priorista*, fol.86v.; *Mss. Riccardiani*, 1851, *Diario*, fols.46v.-47r.; BCSansepolcro, J.107, Bercordati, *Cron.*, fols.27v.-28r.; BUBo, *Mss.*, 97, Alberti, *Hist.*, fol.260; BCABo, *Mss.*, B.2355, Bianchetti, *Ann.*, fol.187; *Mss. Malvezzi*, 59-63, I, fol.242; *Cron. Ramp.*, p.19; *Chron. Esten.*, p.186; *Cron. città Perugia...*, p.167; Mar. Moro, *Mem.*, p.106; Pellini, *Dell'Hist.*, I, p.629

historiography Buoni (1571); Ammirato (1600); Clementini (1617-27); Farulli (1713); Graziani (1745); Amiani (1751); Mecatti (1755); Muratori (1762-64); Muzzi (1842-44); Goracci (1847)

literature Castelli and Moriani (1990); Castelli (1991); Castelli *et al.* (1997)

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catalogues d. Bonito (1691); Pilla (1846); Perrey (1848); Mallet (1853); Mercalli (1883); Giovannozzi (1895a); Baratta (1901); Milne (1911); \*Boschi *et al.* (1995, 1997, 2000)

catalogues p. Giorgetti and Iaccarino (1971); Carrozzo *et al.* (1973); Postpischl (1985); CPTI (1999)

On 25 December 1352 and 1 January 1353, two destructive earthquakes struck the upper Tiber valley, affecting the towns of Borgo San Sepolcro (present-day Sansepolcro) and Città di Castello in particular.

1352 December 25 The first earthquake occurred towards sunset (16:30 UT approx.) and caused some buildings in Sansepolcro to collapse. The foundation stones of the walls which rose above the outermost ditch, although at a depth of more than 4 metres, were hurled out of the ground. The effects at Città di Castello were less severe, but the castle tower collapsed, and Elci castle, situated on the border between the territories of Sansepolcro and Arezzo, where the Torre dell'Elci now stands, was destroyed.

1353 January 1 The second earthquake caused the complete collapse of the town walls and almost all those buildings at Sansepolcro which had not collapsed in the 25 December earthquake. The bell-tower of the abbey where commune documents were kept collapsed. The felt area extended as far north as Bologna.

There were many victims: 500 were killed at Sansepolcro in the first earthquake, and total deaths amounted to more than 2,000 (or 3,000).

The area where the earthquake effects were principally felt was one of great economic and commercial importance, and it had already been struck by an outbreak of plague the year before.

The Boccognani, who were the most powerful members of the local Ghibelline faction, left the town of Sansepolcro together with the mercenaries, who returned to Bologna. As for the reaction of the affected population, the sources record that many inhabitants of Sansepolcro fled into the squares, the town gardens and the surrounding countryside, while many others were entombed in the ruins and died for lack of help.

Reconstruction work began in the early months of 1353, thanks both to the help of Giovanni Visconti, duke of Milan, and to the substantial wealth of the people of Sansepolcro. Their riches, as Matteo Villani points out, had partly been inherited and came partly from speculation over the provision of supplies to the Milanese troops; and so they set about building new houses and palaces that were more beautiful than before.

The historical background was that of an alliance negotiated in 1352-1354 between Sansepolcro and Giovanni Visconti, who was both archbishop and duke of Milan. These were the years when the Visconti embarked on a Tuscan military expedition against Florence and her subject towns, making use in part of troops from her own subject city of Bologna. A few years later, after the failure of the Milanese expedition, Sansepolcro fell under Florentine dominion again.

The sources for this earthquake have been analysed and discussed by Boschi *et al.* (1995). There is evidence of the earthquake in archive documents from some Bolognese *riformagioni* (city council edicts) issued in 1353. They record the payment of compensation by the Visconti *signoria* (to which Bologna was then subject) for some horses used by the Bolognese garrison, which had

“died in the service of the commune of Bologna at the Borgo San Sepolcro at the time of the earthquake”; or again, which “[...] died in the service of the commune at the Borgo of San Sepolcro because of the earthquake”.

*mortui in servicio comunis Bonon. in burgo Sancti Sepulcri ocaxione teremotus.*  
“[...] mortui in servitio comunis in burgo Sancti Sepulcri propter terremotum.

As far as contemporary chronicles are concerned, the main sources are Matteo Villani's *Cronica* (ed. Porta 1995), in which there is a detailed description of the effects of the

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two earthquakes at Sansepolcro and the reconstruction of those buildings which had been destroyed, and the *Liber gestorum in Lombardia* by the Lombard notary Pietro Azario (ed. Cognasso 1925-39). The latter records the effects of the earthquake at Città di Castello, which the author claims to have witnessed himself. Villani records: "Of the great earthquakes which occurred in Tuscany and other areas.

On 25 December of the said year [1352], at vespers, there were great earthquakes, which caused the collapse in Borgo San Sepolcro of some of the buildings in that territory, and as many as five hundred men, women and children were killed. And the castle of Elci, on the border between Arezzo and Borgo (San Sepolcro), collapsed, taking with it those who were there to defend it on behalf of the archbishop of Milan. For some days the earthquakes ceased, and then on the thirty-first day of that month, as the night drew towards the morning of the Calends of January [1 January 1353], major earthquakes began again at dawn. And in the said territory of Borgo (San Sepolcro) they were so terrible that they reduced almost all the buildings in the area to ruins. The shaking during the night, and the collapses on all sides meant that those few who survived fled naked into the gardens and squares, and for most of the local people and those from elsewhere, the houses became tombs for their lacerated bodies. And many of those who were injured or half dead remained for several days without help under the beams and ceilings and other concavities created by the ruins. And many died who would have survived if they had received help. Walls collapsed on all sides and it was heart-breaking to see the slaughter of so many people, carried off as they were to such a harsh sentence of death; and the number of people of both sexes who died in the ruins amounted to more than two thousand. And it is worth recording what happened to them through being subject to tyrannical government. Struck with fear by the first earthquakes, they had left the town and were living in the fields, where they would have survived; but for fear of losing the town, the above-mentioned Piero Sacconi and Nieri da Fagiuola, together with the archbishop's vicar, mounted their horses and forced the local people and the soldiers back into the town. Some fancifully supposed that this was a special judgment from God, but the fact is that these were the first Tuscans to welcome the people of that great tyrant, the archbishop of Milan, thereby causing consternation amongst their neighbours. And with all the loot which they unjustly took from their neighbours, they were acquiring things for nothing and growing unduly fat and rich; for these earthquakes had caused no damage in Tuscany. [...] At this same time [May 1353], the archbishop of Milan sent 300 master (masons) to rebuild the walls and houses of Borgo San Sepolcro which had been damaged or ruined by the earthquake. Those local people who survived had become particularly rich, by inheriting from the dead, and by the scandalous profits they made from loot from their neighbours which they carried to Borgo (San Sepolcro), or because they had continuously sold both provisions and equipment to the soldiers at high prices. Then when the master masons arrived, they began building houses and palaces, and making dwellings which were much more luxurious and beautiful than those they had possessed before; but they were not able to build much, because the town changed its state, as we shall narrate at the appropriate place below".

*Di grandi tremuoti vennono in Toscana, e in altre parti.*

*A dì XXV dicembre del detto anno, in sul vespero, furono grandi terremuoti, i quali abatterono al Borgo a Sansipolcro una parte de li deficii della terra, con danno di bene cinquecento tra uomini e femine e fanciulli morti. E lla rocca d'Elci in su' confini tra Arezzo e 'l Borgo sobissò, con que' viventi ch'erano a guardalla per l'arcivescovo di Milano. E sollevati i tremuoti alquanti dì, poi a dì XXXI del detto mese, la notte, vegnente la mattina calen di gennaio in sul mattutino rinovellarono maggiori terremuoti. E alla detta terra del Borgo furono sì terribili, che quasi tutti li edifici di quella terra fece rovinare, nel cui scotimento, per la notte e per le roine d'ogni parte,*

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*pochi ne poterono campare, fuggendosi ignudi nelli orti e nelle piazze della terra, e quasi la maggiore parte de' terrazzani e de' forestieri che v'erano feciono delle case sepulture a llacerati corpi, e molti magagnati e mezzi morti stettono parecchi di senza aiuto sotto le travi e' palchi e altre concavità fatte per la roina, e assai ne morirono che sarebbero campati se avessero avuto soccorso. Le mura dalla terra d'ogni parte caddono: e di vero grand pietà fu a vedere l'escidio di cotanti Cristiani involti in così aspro giudizio della loro morte, che fatto conto, più di II M uomini d'ogni sesso spirarono sotto quelle ruine. E nonn-è da lasciare senza memoria quello ch'avenne loro per essere sotto la tirannia, che per paura de' primi terremuoti erano usciti della terra e stavano a campo, e sarebbero campati, ma per tema della terra il detto messer Piero Sacconi, e Nieri da Faggiuola col vicario dell'arcivescovo vi cavalcarono, e per forza costrinsono i terrazzani e' soldati a ritornare nella terra. Alcuno favoleggiando dissono che questo fu singulare sentenza di Dio, però che costoro furono i primi in Toscana che diedono ricetta alla gente del gran tiranno arcivescovo di Milano, in confusione de' loro circostanti; e tutte le prede indebitamente tolte a' loro vicini comperavano per niente ingrassando e arricchendo di quelle indebitamente, non avendo i detti terremuoti in Toscana fatto alcun danno. [...]*

*In questo medesimo tempo l'arcivescovo di Milano mandò per fare redificare le mura e lle case del Borgo a Sansipolcro, rovinata e guaste per lo tremuoto, trecento maestri. I Borghigiani rimasi in vita erano sopra modo ricchi per l'eredità de' morti, e per gli sconci guadagni delle prede de' loro vicini condotte al Borgo, e perché a' soldati al continuo avieno venduto caro la loro vittuaglia e li altri arnesi, e però, venuti i maestri, cominciarono a edeficare le case e' palagi, e fare troppo più nobili e più belli abituri che prima non avieno; ma poco poterono edeficare, che lla terra mutò stato, come apresso raconteremo nel suo tempo.*

Azario records:

"However, when the above-mentioned people of the lord of Milan came back to live in Borgo San Sepolcro, there occurred an astonishing and extraordinary event. For on the eve of the nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ or on the previous day, during the night, an earthquake struck that town [Sansepolcro], with the result that as the towers and *palazzi* collapsed, and as the walls of buildings crashed against one another, they were soon destroyed to such an extent that few could be seen still standing; and if the Saracens had sworn to raze that town to the ground, they could not have reduced it to such a degree of destruction even in a week. But by the grace of God, few people died. And it is a fact that the stones placed at the foundations of the walls rising above the outermost ditch, as we have already said, were thrown out of the ground, and the depth of this ditch and in particular of these walls was ten cubits [more than four metres]. The earthquake also affected part of the above-mentioned town of Città di Castello, but it was not so strong there. And the following week, too, at the third hour, there was another earthquake at the same town, and on that occasion the tower and keep of the castle in the town were split open and destroyed, and the son of the castellan and many others died in the ruins, and many other houses which had escaped the first earthquake collapsed and, as I mentioned above, I saw widespread destruction and ruination. For this reason, the mercenaries and the *Boccognani*, who were the most powerful Ghibelline faction [in Borgo San Sepolcro], went away and completely abandoned the town, not wanting to die without a battle. And shortly afterwards they all returned to Bologna, having left these places behind in a state of devastation".

*Reversis autem predictis gentibus Domini Mediolani ad habitandum in Burgo Sancti Sepulcri, mirabilis casus ultra modum emersit. Nam in vigilia nativitatis domini nostri Jesus Christi vel die precedenti, noctis tempore, talis terremotus ipsam terram invasit quod turres et palacia corruentes et parietes murorum simul collidentes et in*

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*brevi hora taliter sunt quassate, quod quasi aliqua erecta vel pauce videbantur et certe, si Sarazeni iurassent ipsam terram prosternere, non fuisset in una epdomanda sic dirupta. Et gens pauca periit, quod fuit gratia Dei; et verum fuit quod lapides existentes in fundamento murorum super fossa exteriori, ut est dictum, prosilierunt super terram, cuius fossati et precipue murorum profunditas erat decem cubitorum et sic fuit terremotus ab una parte Civitatis Castellii antedictae, sed non tam magnus. Et etiam sequenti epdomanda, hora terciarum, fuit alius terremotus in ipsa terra, in quo turris cum cassero castris dicte terre per medium scisa dirupta estitit et sub ipsa filius castelani cum pluribus aliis periit et multe alie domus a primo terremotu evase corruerunt, quarum domorum ut supra destructionem et prostrationem infinitam vidi. Ex quo stipendiarii cum illis de Bocagnanis, potencioribus partis gibeline, exiverun, terram ipsam totaliter destituentes, nolentes sine bello mori. Et post paucam moram omnes Bononiam rediverunt, dimissi dictis partibus sic vastatis.*

After mentioning the serious damage at Borgo San Sepolcro on 1 January 1353, Pietro Villola's 13th century Bolognese chronicle (ed. Sorbelli 1910-40) also mentions the fact that the shock was felt at Bologna, but it was so slight there that people doubted whether there really was an earthquake:

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In the said year, on the first day of the new year, there were great earthquakes at Borgo San Sepolcro, so violent and strong that scarcely a house or a tower was left in the said Borgo (San Sepolcro). And it was also felt at Città di Castello and in those parts; and in this city [Bologna] there were people who were not sure about it, but thankfully it did no damage".

*Miic liii*

*In lo dito milleximo, e fo lo dì d'anno novo, vene gran teramoti a Borgo San Sepolcro, e si feri e grandi, che no romaxe quaxe nè caxa nè torre in lo ditto Borgo. E sentine la Città de Chastello e quelle contrade; et in questa cità fo gente che n'avé dubio, ma no ce fo niente: de gracia.*



1352 12 25 16:00 UT Sites: 3

localities	lat.	long.	I	localities	lat.	long.	I
Sansepolcro	43 34	12 08	VIII-IX	Città di Castello	43 27	12 14	VII
Torre dell'Elci	43 26	12 04	VIII-IX				

1353 01 01 0:30 UT

localities	lat.	long.	I	localities	lat.	long.	I
Sansepolcro	43 34	12 08	IX	Bologna	44 30	11 20	II