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CONSIDERATIONS ON PALAEODEMOGRAPHY AND DEATH
IN THE BRITISH COMMUNITY OF BAGNI DI LUCCA
(19th -20th CENTURIES)

Abstract. The English community of Bagni di Lucca obtained permission by Carlo Ludovico di Borbone, Duke of Lucca, to build and organize in 1842 an autonomous burial ground. This British cemetery operated until the 1930s, with an amount of 137 burials. The “*Register of Burials – Baths of Lucca*”, preserved in the Guildhall Library of London (Ms. 22,910), accurately reports: name, sex, age, marital status and residence, date of burial, name by whom the ceremony was performed and notes about social status and profession of the dead. It was possible, using these data, to obtain some palaeo-demographic information about age of death, in general adult or mature, but with presence of children and babies, about seasonality of deaths, generally in Summer, and sometimes about the cause of death.

Keywords. British cemetery, Bagni di Lucca, palaeodemography, death causes.

In the nineteenth century the European aristocracy and upper classes, especially British, were Grand Touring around Italy, to discover its classical antiquities. Some of the different cities touched by this journey were Pisa, Lucca and Bagni di Lucca, one of the most popular holiday resorts, known for its thermal baths and casino.¹

The British community of Bagni di Lucca, which was growing rapidly, expressed the desire to have its own graveyard, and obtained from Carlo Ludovico di Borbone, Duke of Lucca, the authorization to build and set up an independent cemetery in 1842. The cemetery operated until the 40s of the past century, with a total amount of 137 burials (the last British burial dated 25th September 1943).

The “*Register of Burials – Baths of Lucca*”², preserved in the Guildhall Library of London (Ms. 22,910) accurately reports name, sex, age, marital status and residence, date of burial, name by whom the ceremony was performed and notes about the social status and profession of the dead. These people were generally of a high social status; in fact the most represented class was the aristocracy, followed by officials and engineers.

Using these data, it was possible to obtain some palaeo-demographic information concerning age of death, generally adult or mature, with a smaller presence of

1. Natalia Sereni, “La presenza straniera ai Bagni di Lucca nella seconda metà dell’Ottocento” in *Atti del Convegno Gli stranieri ai Bagni di Lucca nella testimonianza del Cimitero Inglese*, Edizioni Regione Toscana, 1991, pp. 13-18.

2. Laura Giambastiani, “Origini, funzioni e prospettive del Cimitero Inglese ai Bagni di Lucca”, *ibid.* pp. 19-74.



Figure 1 - A view of the English cemetery in Bagni di Lucca (Lessing Archive)

children and babies, seasonality of deaths, (generally in summer), and sometimes the cause of death³.

Some important figures decided to be buried in Bagni di Lucca, for example Henry Stisted⁴ (1786-1859), Colonel of the 1st Royal Dragoon Regiment that fought against Napoleon at Waterloo, Rose Elisabeth Cleveland⁵ (1846-1918), sister of Grover Cleveland, twenty second President of The United States of America, and Evangeline Whipple⁶ (1863-1930) who took care of the wounded in the battle of Caporetto, and the victims of the terrible Spanish Flu which spread all over Europe between 1918 and 1920. However, the most famous person buried in the English cemetery probably is Maria Louise de La Ramée, alias Ouida⁷ (1839-1908), an important but controversial writer who died in poverty after a life full of success and acclaim.

The number of burials in the English cemetery of Bagni di Lucca is particularly

3. Tony Waldron, *Palaeoepidemiology: The Measure of Disease in the Human Past*, California, Left Coast Press, 2007 pp. 129-138.

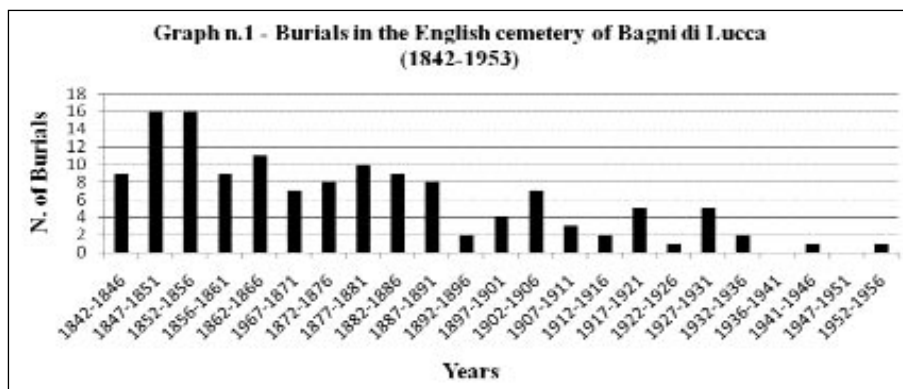
4. Massimo Betti, "La nascita della colonia inglese ai Bagni di Lucca: la famiglia Stisted" in *Atti del Convegno Gli stranieri ai Bagni di Lucca nella testimonianza del Cimitero Inglese*, Edizioni Regione Toscana, 1991, pp. 75-82.

5. Natalia Sereni, "Rose Elisabeth Cleveland", *ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

6. Valeria Catelli, "Evangeline Whipple", *ibid.*, pp. 105-112.

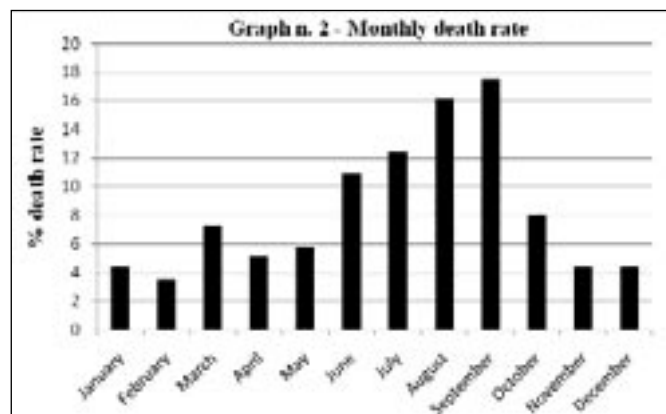
7. Maurizio Burlamacchi, "Ouida: A Memoir", *ibid.*, pp. 87-98.

high for the second half of the 19th century; indeed the highest peak was reached in the decade between 1847 and 1856, with a total of 32 burials, followed by a constant number of 8-10 burials every five years until 1891. In the years that followed there was a rapid decline in the use of the cemetery, which continued until the 30s of the 20th century, with a maximum of 7 burials in the five-year period between 1902 and 1906, but with a number of inhumations generally between 1 and 5 every 5 years (graph 1).



Graph 1 - Burials in the English cemetery from 1842 to 1953

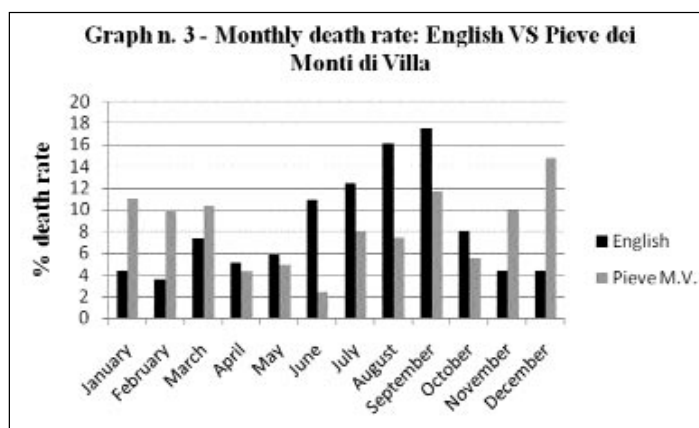
It is evident that the cemetery was mostly used in the period in which Bagni di Lucca was visited by foreign tourists; indeed, the decline in the number of burials in the first half of the 20th century coincides with the progressive decline of Bagni di Lucca as a tourist and thermal centre, until it was completely abandoned in the 50's of the last century.



Graph 2 - English monthly death rate in the cemetery

As far as seasonal and monthly mortality is concerned, the majority of deaths took place in the summer, in the period between June and September (graph 2).

If we compare the contemporary death rate in the rural village of Pieve dei Monti di Villa,⁸ in the municipality of Bagni di Lucca (considered as an expression of “natural” death), we observe a higher number of deaths, with peaks in the autumn and winter months (graph 3), while the number of deaths in the rural community was not particularly elevated in summer. We may therefore conclude that the higher incidence of summer deaths in the British community is “artificial”, as it simply reflects the fact that Bagni di Lucca was most popular with tourists in the summer, but these people returned to their habitual residences in winter.



Graph 3 - Comparison between the monthly death rate in the British community and in the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa

If we examine the number of deaths in the British community on the basis of the age groups, we observe the highest death rate in the period between 25 and 34 years for both sexes. Successively, there is a higher death rate in males between 60 and 64 years, while women appear more long-lived than men, reaching an age range beyond 75 years (graph 4).

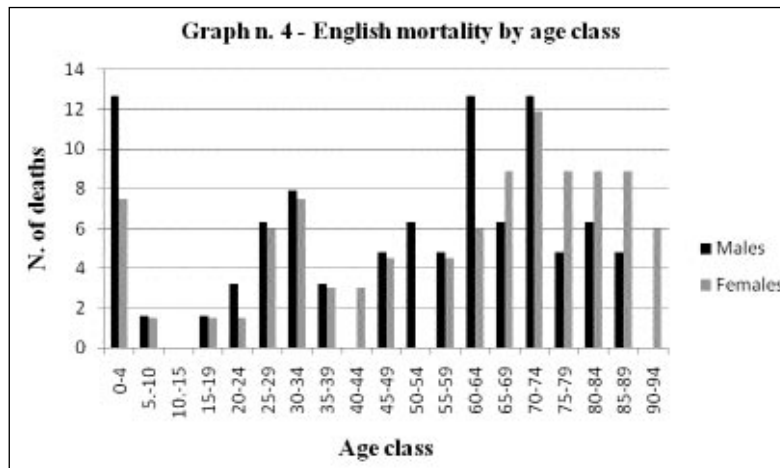
From a comparison with the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa it emerges that the children’s death rate, between date of birth and 4 years, reached 40% (a death rate to be considered “physiological” in the pre-contemporary age), while the deaths of British children only reached 10%. This death rate has obviously been underestimated, since only a small number of births in the British community, and a longer period of post-natal nursing, took place at Bagni di Lucca;

8. Beatrice Romiti, “L’archivio della Pieve di Villa Terenzana e la bacchetta dei morti segnata ‘B’” (1729-1857), in *L’aldilà: Rivista di Storia della Tanatologia*, Istituto Storico Lucchese, VI:1-2 (2000).

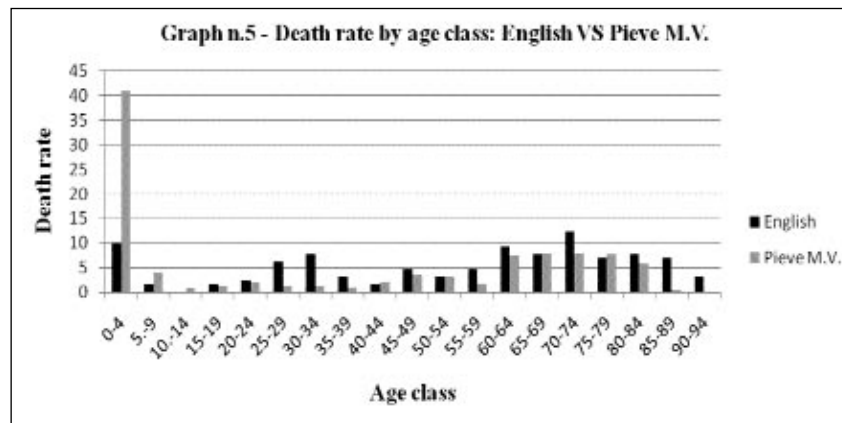
therefore, direct and total comparison between the two mortality curves is impossible (graph 5).

For this reason, we compared the mortality curves of adults of 20 years of age, considering the sexes both separately and together. Even in this case we observe a higher mortality rate of British males between 25 and 34 years of age, while there is late mortality in the peasants aged between 75 and 84 years in the Pieve (graph 6).

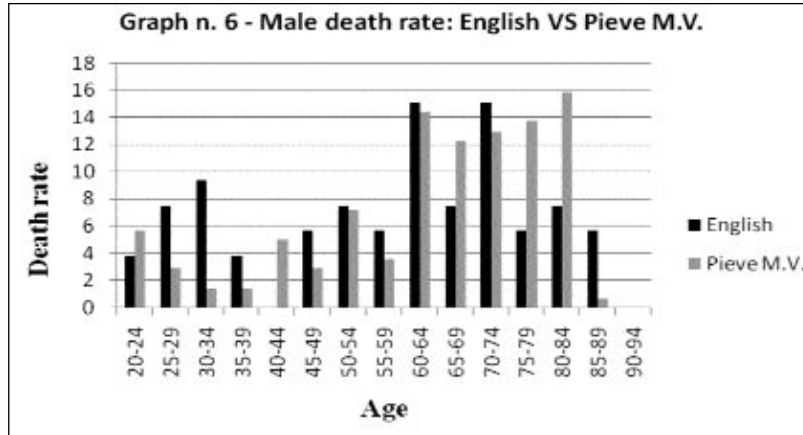
In conclusion, alongside a peak of mortality in adult-young age, British males died before the male inhabitants of the village.



Graph 4 - Mortality by age class in the British community

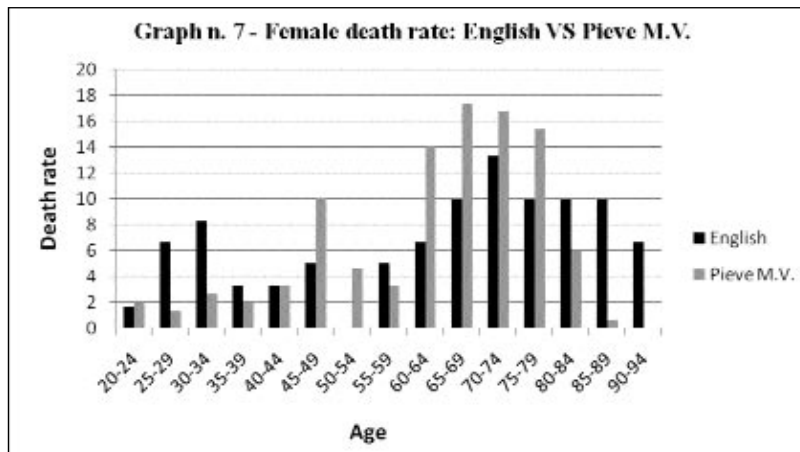


Graph 5 - Comparison between the death rate by age class in the British community and in the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa



Graph 6 - Comparison between the male death rate by age class in the British community and in the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa

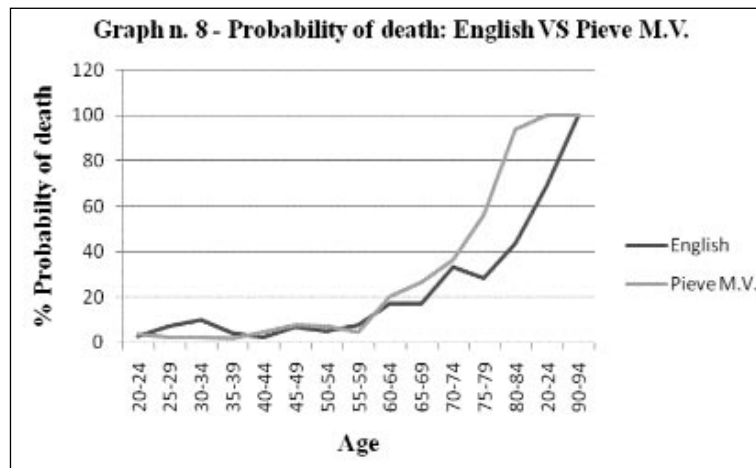
As regards female mortality, we observe the same peak already observed in males between 25 and 34 years of age, but there is an even higher and earlier death rate of peasant women as compared to British ladies starting from the age of 65 years. British women reach an age range which is higher and with a considerable percentage (7%) well beyond 90 years of age (graph 7). Even the life span curve reflects a situation which is better for the British “ladies” than for the peasants.



Graph 7 - Comparison between the female death rate by age class in the British community and in the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa

The results of the palaeo-demographic study certainly reflect the hard life of the peasant women of Val di Lima in Lucca, compared to the “buffer system” represented by the quiet and protected life of the British women. On the contrary, the death rate of male peasants reflects a life which is healthier than that of the British males, probably favored by the advantages offered by the patriarchal society typical of the 19th century Tuscan rural environment.

If we examine the samples including both sexes, the adult-young death peak of the British is confirmed, while there is a higher mortality in the advanced age peasants. This fact is also supported by the curve of a more likely death rate after the age of 60. The life span⁹, with the exception of the decade between 20 and 34 years, is always higher in the British (graph 8).



Graph 8 - Comparison between the probability of death in the British community and in the rural community of Pieve dei Monti di Villa

The explanation of an early death rate of the British community is to be sought in the fact that a large part of adult-young individuals came to Italy, even to Bagni di Lucca, for reasons of health since they were affected by illnesses that could benefit from the Mediterranean climate and thermal practices. These diseases included tuberculosis, often in the severe form of pulmonary phthisis, which affected the young adults of the crowded British cities¹⁰ and which – at least in part – could explain the peak of juvenile deaths in the British community of Bagni di Lucca.

9. Elena Bedini, “Paleodemografia”, in *Non Omnis Moriar*, CISU, 2009, pp. 59-81.

10. Charlotte Roberts, Jane Buikstra, *The Bioarchaeology of Tuberculosis*, University Press of Florida, 2003, pp. 87-186.

It is not by chance that the first person to be buried in the English cemetery, Edward Newberry, certainly died of tuberculosis at the age of 31, on 30 August 1842.¹¹

11. Laura Giambastiani, "Considerazioni storiche sul cimitero anglicano ai Bagni di Lucca", in *Il cimitero anglicano di Lucca*, Istituto Storico lucchese, 1-2 (2003), pp. 45-77.