



SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA



© Author(s)  
E-ISSN 2531-7288  
ISSN 0394/9001



## MEDICINA NEI SECOLI

Journal of History of Medicine  
and Medical Humanities

38/1 (2026) 199-220

Received: 02.05.2025

Accepted: 27.06.2025

DOI: 10.13133/2531-7288/3315

Corresponding author:

roberta.fusco@uninsubria.it

## Popular Euthanasian Attitudes. The Accabadora

*Roberta Fusco*

Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences, University of  
Insubria, Varese, Italy

*Chiara Tesi*

Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences, University of  
Insubria, Varese, Italy

*Mario Picozzi*

Center for Clinical Ethics, University of Insubria, Varese, Italy.

### ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the enigmatic figure of the *accabadora*, a prominent presence in Sardinian folk traditions. The accuser was a woman entrusted with the solemn responsibility of ending the suffering of the dying, ensuring a gentle and merciful death. This paper explores the historical and cultural context surrounding this figure, shedding light on the broader euthanasic attitudes that existed in popular European cultures throughout history. The study focuses on the *accabadora's* ritual and context, examining how these women performed their duties. This study provides a comprehensive overview of historical accounts and contemporary research on the *accabadora*, showcasing a rich tapestry of oral testimonies, literary accounts, and ethnographic findings. The *accabadora* embodies a complex blend of emotions and cultural beliefs, serving as a symbol of life, death, and healing. Despite the controversy surrounding the *accabadora's* actions, society both sought her assistance and marginalized her, highlighting the enigmatic duality of her role.

**Keywords:** Accabadora - Euthanasia - Sardinian popular tradition - Assisted dying - End-of-life practices

## Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the *accabadora*, a figure prominent in Sardinian cultural traditions.

In Sardinian tradition, the *accabadora* was a woman who delegated the task of ending the suffering of the dying, helping them to die, and granting them a gentle and merciful death. The word *accabadora* means “she who puts an end”, that is, “the terminator”. This name is derived from the Sardinian verb *accab(b)are* or *cab (b)ai*, which means “to end, terminate, cease, exhaust”, with derivative meaning variants such as “to mate” and “to kill”. This verb, in turn, is derived from the Spanish *acabar*, meaning “to terminate”<sup>1</sup>.

The existence of popular euthanasia practitioners is an ancient phenomenon found in other European traditions, in which numerous cultural practices - expressions of a mentality open to physical euthanasia that was opposed to “bad death,” identified in long agony and incurable illness<sup>2</sup>. Euthanasia has often been viewed through the present lens as a specific problem of the contemporary world or Greco-Roman antiquity, without considering the intervening millennium, which would have been characterized by a culture of rejection determined by monotheistic religion<sup>3</sup>. Contrary to popular belief, cultures of acceptance of euthanasia, often minority and concealed, are a constant in European history from antiquity to the twentieth century. In both high and popular culture, issues related to euthanasia were formalized into cultural patterns, norms, and social practices in which the subject’s consent varied: it could be demanded, induced as fate, or internalized through centuries-old traditions<sup>4</sup>.

In folk cultures, the protracted suffering of the dying person was linked to specific actions contrary to moral, religious, or magical-superstitious order principles. Such faults would have unnaturally bound the soul to the dissolving body. It was in this context that abstractly euthanasic actions were carried out, that is, practices put in place to hasten and facilitate the death of the agonizing, often contrary to ecclesiastical dictates<sup>5</sup>.

The forms taken by widespread euthanasia were many. In France, Britain, and Northern Europe between the 13th and 18th centuries, there was a deep-rooted tradition known as *mel beniguet* or *maillet béni*, or stone axes used to strike the heads of the sick<sup>6</sup>. In southern Italy, the practice of uncovering the roof in the sick person’s room to hasten their agony was widespread, documented in the ecclesiastical synods of Rimini in 1578 and Melfi and Rampolla in 1645<sup>7,8,9</sup>. Often, condemnation against this practice is mentioned in the same documentary sources prohibiting the use of the yoke on the dying, as in the 1580 Episcopal of Cardinal Paleotti<sup>10</sup>.

Another documented practice is that of euthanasic suffocation using a pillow, practiced in several European areas, especially in Germany during the ancient regime and the first half of the 19th century, implemented by relatives after ritual religious practices<sup>11</sup>.

In the German area, there was another form of euthanasia involving the use and abuse of the pillow and its violent removal. The pillow, or any other object intended to keep the patient's head raised, was violently removed, causing the patient's head to fall. This practice is so widespread that it is treated in an academic dissertation by the lawyer Questel in 1678, the purpose of which is to draw these practices as an actual crime. The doctors interviewed by Quesel maintained that this practice could cause physical problems, especially respiratory problems, and accelerate death<sup>12</sup>.

Some of these traditions have been the subject of legal and cultural reflections, as in the case of the management of hydrophobes. In the 1666 treatise, *Ventilabrum Medico-theological*, by Michaël Boudewyns (1601-1681), the problem of their suffocation is addressed, considering it a respectable action, not only for euthanasia towards the dying person but also to avoid the danger of contagion<sup>13</sup>. The practice of hydrophobic suppression has ancient roots; a 15th-century document attests to it in France. It is an account of a true story that occurred in 1446 in Wissous, in which the victim's brother asked for and obtained a pardon from the king for having practiced euthanasia<sup>14</sup>.

In 1812, the German physician Frank denounced one of the most widespread euthanasia practices, that of the *Leichenbret* (funeral bed). The dying person was removed from the bed and placed on a sack of litter, on wooden boards, or even on floor<sup>15,16</sup>. The meaning is explained in a 1732 publication: the dying person was treated as a corpse prematurely, causing in him depression and acceptance of death, as well as leading to his quicker death by denuding him and leaving him in the cold<sup>17</sup>.

Sometimes, cultural practices are grafted into the body of practices of local churches. In Italy, this was the case of some cultural practices related to the sacrament of extreme unction, condemned by the Synods of Recanati and Loreto in 1781, which denounced that after extreme unction, some denied food and water to the sick person<sup>18,19</sup>. Then there is euthanasia in war: amidst difficulties of all kinds, euthanasia of the severely wounded soldier could be considered a recognized and shared routine. The so-called "coup de grace" was an established tradition, so a short dagger called "mercy" was part of the soldier's equipment in the modern age<sup>20,21</sup>.

Even today, in several Latin American countries, it is possible to find the figure of a *depenador* who relieves the pains in ways that vary according to place. Occasionally, a close relative takes on the task; despenar is considered a duty for a good friend, and refusing it is regarded as a dishonorable act between impiety and cowardice<sup>23</sup>.

The examples cited above demonstrate the existence of a generically euthanasic attitude in popular cultures that must have been widespread and hidden in practice and orality<sup>24</sup>. This euthanasia was sometimes expressed through local procedures, others through merely superstitious ritual practices based on the cultural heritage of taboos, symbolism, and magical rituals. In some experiences, the two levels coexisted and merged, as in the case of the *Accabadora*, who intervened to give death only after other superstitious practices were ineffective.

This article is divided into six main sections, each contributing to a comprehensive and comparative exploration of the *accabadora* and broader popular euthanasic practices. Following the introduction, the section “*The ritual and its context*” examines the *accabadora*’s role in rural Sardinia, reconstructing her actions, symbolic meaning, and social function within the community. The next section, “*State of the art*”, presents an overview of historical, literary, and oral sources, highlighting both documentation of and scholarly debates around the figure’s existence and significance.

The third section, “*The yoke*”, explores the symbolic and ritual function of the yoke used in *accabatura* practices, drawing connections to similar Mediterranean and ancient traditions. The subsequent section, “*Different paths to death*”, expands the discussion to a comparative analysis of other popular practices for aiding the dying across Europe (France, Germany, Southern Italy) and Latin America, underlining both parallels and divergences in terms of methods, ritual context, violence, and moral rationale. A dedicated *methodological note* clarifies the diachronic and transnational approach adopted here. Rather than proposing a linear evolution, the article seeks to identify recurring ritual logics and communal responses to suffering and death across distinct historical and cultural contexts. Finally, the *concluding reflections* connect past traditions to present-day debates on euthanasia, emphasizing symbolic continuities, moral tensions, and enduring questions about suffering, dignity, and the end of life.

### **The ritual and its context**

According to critical literature, the *accabatura* is a cultural tradition of ancient origin in Sardinia until the mid-19th century, especially in the central-northern part of the island<sup>25</sup>. When long agony afflicted a loved one, local tradition involved helping the sick through prayers and adorning the room with sacred images and symbols to heal and protect him<sup>26</sup>. According to the popular practices of Sardinia, people suffering from an illness were possessed by spirits. That constant pain was believed to be due to some fault grave committed in the past by the sufferer<sup>27</sup>. In the context of a typical rural and peasant culture, the fault could have been that of having subtracted someone else’s agricultural yoke or destroyed it, or even moved the stones that delimited property boundaries, or having killed a cat, that helped chase away pests and harmful animals such as mice and birds<sup>28</sup>.

We are in a geographical, historical context where hospitals were few and far between, communication routes were nonexistent, and medical care was scarce and less effective than today<sup>29</sup>. The agony of the sick could last a long time and cause pain and suffering to their loved ones as well. In this context, the idea of ending the suffering of the sick through their death might have seemed a reasonable solution<sup>30</sup>. However, no one among the family members would ever want to take responsibility for making this extreme gesture<sup>31</sup>.

This is where *accabadora* came into play. The woman usually came from the neighboring village and was called by the relatives of the dying if he received the extreme

unction and was unable to die<sup>32</sup>. In other cases, when the dying person was conscious, the woman acted at his explicit request. A fundamental point: the *accabadora* was called only as a last resort to give peace to the dying and reserved the right to examine the dying and decide whether the previous hour had honestly come<sup>33</sup>.

The *accabadora* was a complex figure. Some saw her as a benefactor who alleviated the suffering of the sick and their families, and others as someone who performed a macabre and disturbing gesture. Her presence was a tangible sign of a time when death was an inevitable event but still surrounded by mystery and fear<sup>34</sup>. Tradition tells that she arrives silently at night, dressed in black and completely covered, even in her face, unrecognizable to anyone. She used to enter the dying person's room and first had any sacred object removed, including amulets, crucifixes, medals, and holy images<sup>35</sup>. It was believed that the mediation and prayer of loved ones protected the dying and could prolong the soul's detachment from the body<sup>36</sup>.

Then, she used to remain alone with the dying and opened the windows to let the soul out. If, after these preliminary actions' death did not occur, after carefully assessing the condition of the patient and having uttered prayers or magic formulas called *brebus*, the woman proceeded to euthanasia<sup>37</sup>. After that, she would close the door, remaining alone with the dying person, and open the windows to allow the soul to leave once it had detached itself from the body of the dying person<sup>38,39</sup>.

There were several modalities she could use. She could resort to a yoke placed under the nape with a blow that was supposed to cause instant death. It was smothering him with a pillow or hands by covering his nose and mouth or squeezing his neck between his legs<sup>40</sup>. Another possibility was to use a *matzocca*, a gnarled all-wooden mace like a hammer, of which there is a specimen preserved at the Galluras Ethnographic Museum in Luras, with which she would give a sharp blow to a precise point on the head, the forehead or the nape of the neck<sup>41</sup>. It is reasonable to think that the operation was not always quick and painless and that sometimes a moan escaped the agonized person. And it is probably related to a Sardinian saying that sounds like this: "*su ohi de s'accabadore*", that is, "the ohi caused by the accabadora"<sup>42</sup>.

When her task was over, the woman went away in silence. It is helpful to underline that the practice did not provide for any remuneration because paying to give death was considered a sin<sup>43</sup>. In folk tradition, several proverbs refer to this figure. For example, a proverb from Desulo says: "When the hour has come, the *accabadora* arrives". In Orgosolo, on the other hand, there is a saying, more precisely an expletive, which quotes, "May they call you the Accabbadora!"<sup>44</sup>.

Everyone in the village knew about the work of these women, but it was a taboo subject; within families, it was spoken of very reticently, especially to those who were not Sardinian. Society was convinced that the work of the *accabadora* was admirable because she took it upon herself to end the suffering of the sick<sup>45</sup>. They implicitly recognized a social utility supported by is taking place according to a pre-established

community-approved ritual for this reason, the person who physically performed the act was not considered a murderer but a person who, on behalf of the whole community, took on the task of relieving the passing. Despite its widespread, no official condemnation, either institutional or religious, was ever perpetrated against the practice, as if it were somehow tolerated<sup>46</sup>. It even happened that the priest was called upon to give last rites before the arrival of the *accabadora*. Despite her controversial task, she was thus a believing woman who, in an act of extreme mercy, freed the soul from a suffering body languishing between life and death in prolonged agony<sup>47</sup>.

It was not only an act of pity. That performed by the woman was also an action of social value, necessary for the survival of relatives who often did not have the resources to alleviate the suffering of the sick<sup>48</sup>. It is essential to remember that the Sardinian population based its economy on agriculture and pastoralism and that, in this context, protracted care for sick people with no chance of recovery took time and vital resources away from work and the very subsistence of families.

The *accabadora* were not only “dominatrices” but also midwives and curators; in the critical literature, they are often referred to as “practical” women who knew human anatomy perfectly and were experts in traditional remedies and medicinal herbs. So, they were figures perfectly inserted into society and recognized by all<sup>49</sup>.

### State of the art

The existence of the figure of the *accabadora* in Sardinia counts various literary, documentary, and oral testimonies. The earliest accounts concerning the *accabadora* date back to 1700, by two Jesuit missionaries, Bonaventura Licheri and Giovanni Battista Vassallo. During their mission to evangelize Sardinia, in denouncing the work of the *accabadoras*, they became the first witnesses to these figures and their actions<sup>50</sup>. In the 1800s, there are numerous travel accounts written by French and English noblemen through Sardinia that mention *accabadora*, including Englishman John Warre Tyndale (1811- 1897) in *L'isola di Sardegna* of 1849<sup>51</sup>; Robert Tennant in *Sardinia and its resources*<sup>52</sup>; Charles Edwardes in *Sardinia and the Sardes* of 1889<sup>53</sup>; and Frenchmen Gaston Vuiller (1845- 1915) in *La Sardaigne* of 1891<sup>54</sup>.

In the historical-literary sphere, the problem of *accabadora* first appeared in 1826 in the first edition of the *Voyage* of the General, naturalist and cartographer Alberto Ferrero Della Marmora (1789-1863), which combines two different historical genres of *accabadura*: the first coming from the texts of the Greek and Latin classics, which claim that in Sardinia in antiquity there was “the custom of killing the old”<sup>55</sup>, while the second refers to more recent centuries in which this practice would have remained alive in some regions of the island, where there were “women in charge of hastening the end of the dying”; a remnant of barbarism, Della Marmora commented, which, he points out, “has fortunately disappeared for a hundred years”<sup>56</sup>.



Two years after the first edition of the *Voyage*, in 1828, the subject was taken up by the traveler William Henry Smyth (1788 – 1865), who, in his diaries, attributed “the singular custom of strangling the dying” to the inhabitants of the Sardinian region of Barbagia. The English author introduced the term *accabadora*. Smyth stated that this euthanasic practice was abolished around seventy years ago thanks to the Piedmontese Jesuit Giovanni Battista Vassallo, who, in missions, preached to the people of the interior of the island, would put an end to the tradition during the eighteenth century<sup>57</sup>. In 1833, in the entries of his book, the abbot Vittorio Angius (1797 -1862) inserted a short paragraph entitled, precisely, *Sas Accabadoras*. Angius writes that the term *accabadoras* is used to “signify certain wenches, who would truncate the agony of a dying man and shorten the pains of a stunted death by giving them either on the breast or in the cup with a short mazzero, that all hope seemed in vain”<sup>58</sup>. Angius, referring to the writings of Zenodotus of Ephesus and Timaeus, argued that this practice had its roots in the Greco-Latin literary tradition, which attributed to the ancient Sardinian communities the tradition of relieving their elderly parents of their suffering when they became a burden to the family, typically when they reached the age of 70. Such an act would take the form of pushing the elderly parents into a precipice while they “laughed holding as happy and egregious the death they received from the unholy pity of those to whom they had given their lives”. Hence, the tradition concerning the so-called “sardonic laughter” is also recalled by Homer<sup>59</sup>.

In his book on the tradition of Sardinia, Antonio Bresciani (1844 al 1846) states that since the Council of Trento, the number of *accabadores* had been reduced<sup>60</sup>. Gino Bottihloni (1887-1963), in *Vita Sarda* of 1925, dwells on the typical amulets of the *accabadore*<sup>61</sup>. Massimo Pittau (1921-2019) confirms the presence of these figures within the oral transmission of the memories of older adults<sup>62</sup>. Again, the Turin writer Carlo Varese (1793-1866) mentioned the *accabadora* in his 1830 historical novel *Folchetto Malaspina*<sup>63</sup>. One of the most important recent studies on the subject was conducted by Alessandro Bucarelli and Carlo Lubrano, a criminal anthropologist and forensic specialist, respectively. They rigorously analyze this figure, concluding by affirming its existence<sup>64</sup>.

In recent years, these traditions and rites about death in Sardinia have also been the subject of several theses, such as Egidiangela Sechi’s dedication to euthanasia with the yoke in the Sardinian village of Sindia. Today, there are conspicuous and significant direct oral testimonies left by elders who had personal knowledge of such figures, such as those recounted in the documentary *Sa Femina Accabadora - la Dama della Buona notte* by Fabrizio Galatea, in which, according to the interviewees, the *accabadore* acted until the 1960s in the villages of the island’s interior.

Finally is the video testimony of Paolina Concas, who tells of having witnessed with her own eyes the work of the *accabadora* of her village, Seulo, in the early 1940s in her own home, where her aunt had been suffering excruciating agony for days without being able to die in peace<sup>65</sup>.

Despite such attestations, historians and anthropologists have no unanimity of thought on the real existence of the *accabadora*; several scholars dispute its function and recognition of its social role within the communities where traces of it have been found<sup>66</sup>. Others deny the historical existence of this figure in Sardinia, which they consider barbaric, primitive, and contrary to the Christian faith, and attribute it to legends and superstitions lacking a scientific basis. The opinions most opposed to the existence of the *accabadora* are those of Sardinian traditions scholar Italo Bussa and anthropologist Francesco Alziator (1909-1977)<sup>67</sup>. Through their research, they questioned whether these figures could kill. Alziator believed that something had to be true in the texts of nineteenth-century authors, so he advocated, at least in the first work cited, systematic research<sup>68</sup>. In later works, he asserted that there was no doubt about the phenomenon's existence in antiquity and until the so-called Byzantine encyclopedia of the *Suida*, in which the practice is given for sure and associated with that of sardonic laughter<sup>69</sup>. Instead, the two authors speculate that the *accabadore* cared for the dying through ancient rituals and magical formulas that, perhaps, were meant to invoke the end of their agony with healing or ultimate death. Hence, all the derivative tales around this figure may have arisen, leaning more toward an *accabadora* who acted superstitiously, indirectly, rather than practically and violently<sup>70</sup>.

The key to understanding whether the *accabadora* was implementing symbolic euthanasia practices or active ones is found in the writings of Angius in which the abbot, referring to an unspecified locality in the diocese of Cagliari, noted about *accabador*; the cultural practice of removing from the dying person's room or his own body religious objects considered protective and of "affixing a yoke to his neck"<sup>71</sup>. Recalled here is the second form of *accabadura*, ritual *accabadura*, practiced, according to Angius, along with or as an alternative to active "violent" *accabadura*<sup>72,73</sup>. Having ascertained that two different models of *accabadura* coexisted, the active and the symbolic one, it is possible to assume that these different archetypes over time have undergone significant transformations and mutual contaminations to the point that the distinction between the two traditions has faded, giving rise to new developments and narratives that have mixed oral tradition and historical sources.

Despite the critical positions of General Della Marmora, Admiral Smyth, and Abbot Vittorio Angius, and recently of Italo Bussa<sup>74,75,76,77</sup>, forms of active euthanasia in which one acts to end the life of an individual turn out to be documented by the scholar Franco Fresi<sup>78</sup> and by the forensic scientist and criminal anthropologist Alessandro Bucarelli<sup>67</sup>, but not only by them<sup>79,80</sup>.

### The yoke

Among the elements that frequently recur in stories about the *accabadora* are those above "su jualeddu", the yoke of a plow or wagon made in miniature. Angius claimed



that this wooden object was considered the most crucial remedy to end the suffering of a dying person<sup>81</sup>. Turchi reports that the yoke was placed under the dying person's pillow during the rite of extreme unction; it was believed that the yoke, even when old and unusable, should never be destroyed or burned, being considered a sacred object, religiously respected as a symbol of agricultural labor. Once consumed, even if it became unserviceable, it was placed in a corner of the house and kept. Otherwise, the moment of death would be suffered and accompanied by a long and painful agony<sup>82</sup>. Some oral traditions report, however, that before contact with the nape, the yoke was passed slowly over the legs and chest until it reached the head. At the same time, the prey was recited to relieve his conscience of the guilt that prevented him from dying in peace<sup>83</sup>. The analogy with the ancient Romans, who saw the yoke as a symbol of purification and atonement, is remarkable<sup>84</sup>. According to the Roman tradition, there was the *Tigillum Sororium*, a wooden beam representing a yoke that remained between two poles under which precisely those who had to atone for a grave fault were made to pass. It is well known that murderers had to pass under it; according to tradition, the last survivor of the Orazi family was forced to cross it to atone for the murder of his sister Camilla. Also, in ancient Italy, there was the so-called "passum sub iugum" ("passage under the yoke"), which forced one or more people to pass under a rural yoke. This ritual was performed to remove the "guilt of blood"<sup>85,86</sup>.

Traditions like yoke-related ones are found in many Italian regions and even France<sup>87,88</sup>, for the tradition related to the yoke and its enormous symbolic importance in these societies, it is essential to point out that it was also placed under the bed of the parturient. The yoke was believed to promote childbirth and was placed behind the door to protect children from the *sùrbile*, the witch-vampire of Sardinian legends. The sacred and apotropaic significance is evident, particularly at the time of individuals' birth and death<sup>89</sup>. With time, the practice of euthanasia faded away. Still, the tradition of the yoke was maintained by acquiring an increasingly allegorical aspect: the heavy yoke of oxen was replaced by small miniature yokes of exclusively symbolic value, carved from an olive or wild olive branch, utilized in church on Palm Sunday or Holy Thursday<sup>90</sup>. Three forensic physicians conducted two critical anatomopathological studies on the yoke as a possible lethal object, Bucarelli, Lubrano, and later, Cinus<sup>91,92</sup>. Both studies consider it plausible that the function of the yoke, once placed under the nape, was to injure the tooth of the epistrophe by an appropriate blow on the forehead of the sick person using a hand or with the use of the *matzocca*, as is recounted in some localities causing the death of the ill person<sup>93</sup>.

### **Different paths to death**

As previously highlighted, other popular forms of aiding the dying are also attested. However, some of these have remained in the collective memory in degraded and mis-

understood forms, mainly due to their more violent and tragic aspects. A significant example comes from the Armorican tradition of the “mel Benguet” or “Maillet b  ni”, recorded between France and England from the 13th to the 18th centuries<sup>94</sup>. The “Mel Benguet”, or “hammer of life and death”, was a hammer used to strike the dying on the head, representing a particularly violent form of euthanasia. Archaeologist Harmois reports the case of a Breton woman who lent the hammer inherited from her ancestors to her dying neighbors so they could use it to ease their passing<sup>95</sup>. Jean-Lo  c Lequellec, supporting this practice, mentioned a case from 1892 in the Pays de Caruel, where the hammer was kept in the village chapel, available to the community<sup>96</sup>. The lack of an elaborate ritual and the use of direct violence to end suffering sharply differentiate this practice from that of the *accabadora*, who, although also intervening to bring about death, did so in a less brutal, more intimate, and symbolic way.

In other cases, these practices have left traces in historical documentation. In southern Italy, for instance, a tradition is recorded in several ecclesiastical synods, such as the Synod of Rimini in 1578 and the Synods of Melfi and Rampolla in 1645, which involved removing the roof or opening a window in the room of the dying to hasten death<sup>97,98</sup>. The idea behind this practice was that exposing the dying person to cold air could hasten the death process, thereby reducing prolonged suffering. The Synod of Rimini urged priests to put an end to what it called a “satanic horror”<sup>99</sup>. However, this tradition was not uniform: in some contexts, the aim was not to hasten death but rather to facilitate the release of the soul immediately after death, allowing it to “fly away” without obstacles from the domestic environment<sup>100</sup>. Unlike these methods, which sought to influence death through external factors such as climate or the physical surroundings, the *accabadora* directly intervened on the body of the dying person using specific tools, like a wooden stick. The *accabadora*’s actions often occurred after the priest had given the blessing and administered the last rites. This dynamic represented a significant distinction from the practices widespread in southern Italy, explicitly condemned by ecclesiastical synods.

There are documented examples where euthanasia was reserved for specific categories of patients, such as those who have hydrophobia. Physician Micha  l Boudewyns addressed this subject in his treatise *Ventilabrum medico-theologicum*, published in 1666. Boudewyns examined the question of whether it was legitimate to alleviate the suffering of a patient in agony, questioning the moral permissibility of accelerating their death to end their torment. Although the general answer was negative, Boudewyns acknowledged the ethical dilemma faced by doctors, who were torn between their duty to heal and the patient’s expressed desire to die<sup>101</sup>. However, Boudewyns identified an exception for those who have hydrophobia, a condition caused by rabies, which leads to excruciating suffering after being bitten by infected animals. Since death was considered inevitable once the diagnosis was confirmed, Boudewyns justified the suffocation of these patients as an acceptable practice, not only to relieve their suffering

but also as a preventative measure to protect the community from the risk of infection. In this scenario, accelerating the patient's death was seen as an act of legitimate defense<sup>102</sup>. This practice of euthanasia has very ancient roots. A French document from 1446 recounts an episode in Wissous where a man requested and obtained the king's pardon for having performed euthanasia on his hydrophobic brother<sup>103</sup>. This episode highlights the moral and legal ambiguity surrounding euthanasia practices of the time, revealing how society sought to balance compassion for the ill with the protection of the community. The treatment of hydrophobic patients, in this context, represented an extreme practice tied to a medical condition that aroused fear and hatred. The decision to end the patient's life was driven not only by pity but also by the need to prevent further contagion. Unlike other forms of euthanasia, the focus here was not solely on reducing individual suffering but also on ensuring collective safety, making euthanasia a public health measure.

In Germany, a documented practice from the 17th century involved the violent removal of a pillow from under the head of a dying person, causing their head to drop abruptly and hastening death. This local practice was discussed in 1678 by jurist Questel, who wrote an academic dissertation to have this practice recognized as prosecutable murder. The task of carrying out this form of euthanasia primarily fell on elderly women, referred to by Questel as "muliercole", who were tasked with caring for the sick and infirm. Family members and friends often ignored or tolerated such practices out of negligence or malicious intent. However, some of these women abused their power, removing the pillow from patients who were not yet close to death. Questel recounts cases where, despite the intervention, some patients survived, suggesting that the consent of the dying person was not always sought<sup>104</sup>. The process unfolded in several stages: the "muliercole" would first isolate themselves from the patient, sending away relatives and friends to prevent disturbances. They would then forcefully remove the pillow, causing the patient's head to drop, often resulting in death. The clandestine nature of this practice indicated an awareness of its illegality, as these women operated in secrecy. Questel questioned the legitimacy of this act even if the patient had consented. The jurist's answer was negative, as the dying person's mere wish was insufficient to legitimate the action. Beyond violating the interests of the family and community, human life was not considered the individual's property but rather belonged to God<sup>105</sup>. Therefore, the patient's consent did not justify an act regarded as either murder or suicide, with the risk of causing not only physical death but also the eternal damnation of the patient, throwing them into a dangerous state of spiritual confusion that jeopardized the salvation of their soul<sup>93</sup>. Lutheran pastors and confessors firmly forbade this practice, considering it a grave sin before God. In his sermons on the Passion, the 17th-century Lutheran theologian Philipp Jakob Spener unequivocally condemned the spread of such practices<sup>106</sup>. Questel called for increased oversight by law enforcement, advocating for specific punishments and sanctions,

and even proposed an oath for caregivers<sup>107</sup> However, he was unable to formalize this practice as a particular crime. He was, however, aware that pillow removal represented only one of the various forms of popular euthanasia present during that time. In Germany, other forms of euthanasia were also documented, such as the suffocation of the dying by blocking their nostrils and mouth. This practice was prohibited by the Senate of Metz in 1777, with a fine of 30 pounds<sup>108</sup>. Unlike the *accabadora*, who operated within a religious and ritualized context, the German practices were less tied to a spiritual dimension and more rooted in suspicious, potentially criminal local practices, eventually becoming the subject of legal scrutiny. In some regions where these practices were prevalent, a specific testamentary clause emerged in which the dying person stipulated that their heirs were not to allow the removal of the pillow under penalty of disinheritance<sup>109</sup>. This demonstrates how deeply ingrained the fear of these practices was, perceived not only as physical violations but also as morally unjust interference in the natural process of death.

Also in Germany, in 1812, German physician Frank denounced one of the most widespread forms of euthanasia in the country: the *Leichenbret* (funeral board). This practice involved removing the dying person from their bed and placing them on a straw sack, wooden boards, or even directly on the floor<sup>110</sup>. The symbolic and psychological significance of this practice was explored in a 1732 dissertation by Friedrich Arnold (1803 - 1890), which explained that the dying person was treated as a corpse in advance. This treatment led the patient into a state of depression and acceptance of death, as it deprived them of the dignity and warmth of the bed, exposing them to cold and loneliness. Such conditions accelerated the process of death, not only physically but also psychologically, influencing the mental state of the dying person and hastening their surrender to death<sup>111</sup>.

The German practice of the funeral board aimed to hasten the patient's death through both physical and psychological manipulation, preparing them for death by stripping them of dignity and the hope of survival. However, while *Leichenbret* acted indirectly, depriving the person of comfort and causing a slow, passive death, other practices, like the violent removal of the pillow, involved a more aggressive and direct intervention with an immediate physical impact.

The funeral board practice mirrors dynamics condemned by the Synods of Recanati and Loreto in 1781. The synods denounced that, after receiving the last rites, some patients were denied food and water, thus accelerating their death<sup>112</sup>. This behavior illustrates how the line between religious and local traditions could blur, with religion sometimes bent to justify passive euthanasia practices. In both cases, there is a form of abandonment that deprives the sick of essential care, such as the warmth of a bed or nourishment, naturally leading to death. The Italian practice is closely intertwined with a religious context, where the idea of abandoning the sick after the last rites represented a distortion of spiritual prescriptions. This integration of

popular tradition into the Italian ecclesiastical context parallels the *accabadora*'s practices in Sardinia.

Other testimonies of euthanasia practices come from literary sources. In the second half of the 16th century, the Ferrarese diplomat Giulio Roviglio Rosso (?) described a form of quick and "efficient" euthanasia common among the population of isolated English villages, particularly those living far from the sea. Rosso wrote: "I do not wish to remain silent about another sort of compassion they use for the sick, which is that, once abandoned by the doctors and with no remedy for their recovery, the closest relatives take a pillow, place it over the sick person's face, and then sit on it, thus suffocating them"<sup>113</sup>.

This practice, reported by the diplomat, highlights a solution adopted in poorer communities where access to doctors was limited and effective treatments were unavailable. The act of suffocating the dying person with a pillow, carried out by relatives, likely appeared as an extreme decision, possibly seen as an act of mercy to relieve unbearable suffering. However, this practice reveals a stark approach to death, reflecting the social and cultural limitations of the time, where managing death was often entrusted to practical, though violent, solutions.

During wartime, the practice of the *coup de grâce*, or mercy stroke, represented another form of socially accepted euthanasia. This method, aimed at shortening the suffering of gravely injured soldiers, differed significantly in its context of urgency and survival rather than being part of ritual or tradition. In a setting marked by financial, medical, and hygienic difficulties, the *coup de grâce* could be considered a necessary routine. It was so ingrained in tradition that soldiers were equipped with a small dagger called a Mercy<sup>114</sup> during the early modern period. This tool, meant to end the lives of severely wounded soldiers quickly and without suffering, reflected the social acceptance and practicality of this act in a wartime context.

The figure of the *despenador* in Latin America, a village professional specializing in alleviating the pain of the dying, reflects a cultural continuity with similar European practices, though adapted to local contexts. This figure embodies an interpretation of mercy and honor toward the dying that parallels the role of the *Accabadora*, albeit with different methods and practices. In some Latin American cultures, the *despenador* plays a similar role, seeking to ease suffering through practices that vary according to local traditions. The institution of this figure, possibly of pre-Hispanic origin, has left traces in countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Paraguay<sup>115</sup>.

In summary, while all these figures and practices respond to a common need—the interruption of prolonged suffering—how this goal is achieved differs significantly. The *accabadora*, with her ritualized and intimate approach, represents an example of euthanasia rooted in mercy. She operated in a context of respect and ceremony, often after religious rites, striving to relieve the dying person's suffering in a respectful and meaningful way. In contrast, the *mel beniguet* in Armorica, with its brutality, presents

a stark contrast, showing a direct and violent approach devoid of ritual context. The German practices of the funeral bed and the violent removal of the pillow show another dimension, where methods, although intended to shorten suffering, were often harsh and lacked spiritual significance. These practices focus less on spiritual comfort and practical, frequently brutal, solutions. Integrating popular practices into the religious sphere, such as denying food and water to the sick after the last rites, represents an emblematic example of how societies tried to negotiate the boundary between faith, mercy, and death, sometimes arriving at morally ambiguous and controversial solutions. The treatment of rabies victims offers further reflections on how euthanasia could be justified not only to relieve individual suffering but also as a public health measure. The history of these practices reveals a complex balance between mercy, necessity, and social norms.

These comparisons not only shed light on the variety of cultural and historical approaches to euthanasia but also on the deep roots of such practices in different traditions and sociocultural contexts.

### **Methodological note on temporal and cultural comparisons**

This study adopts a diachronic and transnational approach to examine the persistence, transformation, and coexistence of popular attitudes toward euthanasia, exploring community responses to suffering and death in different historical and geographical contexts. Although comparing practices separated by centuries and shaped by different religious, social, and cultural systems may seem problematic, the aim is not to trace a linear historical development but rather to identify recurring themes, ritual logics, and moral justifications that have informed social practices related to the end of life. The variety of sources, ranging from modern European texts to the oral traditions of twentieth-century Sardinia, does not intend to support the idea of a direct continuity but serves to offer an analytical framework through which similar needs (such as managing agony or the limits of care) are expressed in culturally distinct but structurally comparable ways. The temporal breadth is therefore an heuristic tool rather than a claim of uninterrupted tradition. Each example is historically contextualized and related to the others, highlighting how popular beliefs and practices regarding death can reveal dynamics between formal authority, informal authority, and local values. This approach fits into a well-established tradition of historical and social studies<sup>116, 117, 118</sup>. Supported by recent research exploring the intersection between medical practices, symbolic systems, and social norms<sup>119, 120</sup>.

### **Some reflections**

Understandably, such an evocative tradition as that of the *accabadora* arouses the need to be narrated through the cited writings and numerous web pages that report



articles on death, mourning, and euthanasia, making extensive reference to this figure. However, as the anthropologist Di Lernia (2001) points out, a fundamental element in the narratives on the accabadora often escapes the attention of authors, bloggers, and analysts: her profession<sup>121</sup>.

*The accabadora was a midwife, thus mastering the art of both giving life and taking it away—a dual role that embodies a profound symbolic power.* In this capacity, she also possessed the art of healing, drawing from folk medicine, rituals, and herbal knowledge often shrouded in secrecy (Ginzburg, 1991). Furthermore, she was also an attitudadora, a mourner, and a nurse; only those who know how to nourish life can possess the gentleness necessary to assist its passage. This dual function—creator and terminator—echoes what Marija Gimbutas (1991) described as the sacred feminine principle, encompassing life, death, and rebirth<sup>122</sup>.

According to Di Lernia the *accabadora* effectively embodies the indescribable mixture of anticipation and fear, love and hate, gratitude and resentment that everyone feels towards someone who, while acting for good, can also necessarily act for evil<sup>123</sup>. While she was accepted and out by the community she was also marginalized, denied, and silenced by the same community that had invoked her aid<sup>124</sup>.

Sardinian rural society developed complex cultural constructs and ritual systems to manage emotional tension and facilitate transitions between life and death. These constructs were grounded in shared symbolic norms and taboos, aimed at ensuring a peaceful passage and reinforcing social cohesion<sup>125</sup>. The fear of prolonged suffering, especially when medicine was ineffective or unavailable, served as a moral and emotional justification for seeking mercy killing.

In this context, the *accabadora* played a crucial role in facilitating the dying journey as part of a multifaceted ritual in which they were accompanied on their final journey. In a field of research and study as delicate and complex as that of the so-called *accabadora* women, or more simply the phenomenon of the accabadura, it isn't easy to establish whether the *accabadora* is a historical truth or a legend<sup>126</sup>. Regardless of the lethal or non-lethal outcome, the accabadura expressed an euthanasic attitude. It was not of fundamental importance whether the yoke placed under the dying bed produced specific results; those who performed these practices believed such results could be achieved by accepting and participating. This revealed their recognition of the desirability of euthanasic solutions, especially of a pre-established type. The aim was to hasten death, in contrast to the prevailing norms of official culture. Another important aspect is that all this cultural heritage moved within a generically Christian cultural universe, which was not repudiated but mixed and coordinated with specific anxieties and local practices in the face of the problem of death, understood in its physical dimension. The request for euthanasia often appeared to be addressed to God.

Notably, the *accabadora* would intervene only after the parish priest and did not replace him, and specific masses of liberation were also celebrated, such as the bre-

bus<sup>126</sup>. Although in the *accabadora*, euthanasia was perceived in its physicality and consisted of a painless agony and a quick death, religious comfort was still recognized and necessary. Finally, the *accabadora* intervened after the doctor and carried out a task that the latter, from a technical point of view, could have performed more correctly and adequately for the objective. This highlights a key anthropological insight: in many societies, the transition from life to death is regulated not just by medicine, but also by ritual authority and cultural consent<sup>127,128</sup>.

Today, the topic of euthanasia is forcefully imposing itself on consciences; it is at the center of intense ethical, legal, and medical debates.

The figure of the *accabadora* and the popular euthanasia practices of the past raise questions that still resonate today in an era in which medical advances have significantly extended life expectancy but have also led to new challenges regarding the quality of life in its final stages.

In contemporary society, euthanasia and assisted suicide are topics of heated debate in many countries, involving legislators, health professionals, philosophers, theologians, and public opinion. Legal discussions often revolve around the individual's right to self-determination versus the state's obligation to protect life<sup>129,130</sup>.

There is discussion about whether and how to legalize practices that allow people suffering from terminal illnesses or conditions of unbearable suffering to end their lives with medical assistance<sup>131</sup>. Health professionals face complex ethical dilemmas. On the one hand, the fundamental principle of *primum non nocere* (first, do no harm) and the Hippocratic Oath commit physicians to preserve life; on the other, there is the responsibility to alleviate suffering and respect the patient's wishes<sup>132</sup>.

Palliative medicine has made significant progress in providing care that improves the quality of life of terminally ill patients, but it does not permanently eliminate pain and discomfort<sup>133</sup>.

The social implications of euthanasia involve questions of human dignity, the value placed on life in extreme suffering, and the role of family and community in decision-making. Societies must deal with different cultural, religious, and moral perspectives, which influence opinions on the permissibility of euthanasia. Some fear that legalization could lead to abuse or pressure on the vulnerable, while others argue that legal recognition of euthanasia is an act of compassion and respect for personal autonomy<sup>134</sup>. Engaging with historical figures such as the *accabadora* offers a valuable historical perspective to understand how societies have addressed these issues. Although operating in a specific cultural and religious context, the *accabadora* represented a communal response to suffering and death based on shared rituals and a conception of piety that integrated spiritual and cultural dimensions. This connection highlights how fundamental questions of suffering, human dignity, and the right to a dignified death have remained constant throughout the centuries, even as cultural and legal responses have changed. The figure of the *accabadora* is symbolically placed in this context,

offering a lens through which to reflect on how the relationship between society and suffering, life and death, has evolved and continues to evolve.

## Bibliography, references and notes

### General Bibliography

- Alziator F, *Il folklore sardo*. Sassari: La Zattera; 1957.
- Alziator F, *Tracce di rituali Pagani nella tradizione popolare sarda*. Padova: Cedam; 1963.
- Casalis C, *Dizionario geografico, storico, statistico, commerciale degli stati di S. M. il re di Sardegna*. Torino: Tipografia Cassone, Marzorati e Vercelloni; 1833.
- Ariès P, *The hour of our death*. New York: Knopf; 1981.
- Arnold H W, Joachim GA, *Dissertatio iuridica de vivi sepultura delicto e poena*. Lipsia: Literis io. Christuui langehenemimi; 1732.
- Arras MA, *Accabadora e la sacralità del femminile. Riti e credenze nella tradizione popolare sarda*. Torino: Anake; 2011.
- Azara M, *Tradizioni popolari della Gallura: dalla culla alla tomba*. Sala Bolognese: A. Forni; 2005.
- Banović B, Turanjanin V, Miloradović A, *An Ethical Review of Euthanasia and Physician-assisted Suicide*. Iran J Public Health 2017;46(2):173-179.
- Bresc H, *Le corps souffrant, maladies, et medications*. Nice: Univesità de Nice; 1984.
- Bresciani A, *Dei costumi dell'isola di Sardegna comparati cogli antichissimi popoli orientali*. Napoli: Nel cortile di S. Sebastiano; 1850.
- Baumrin B, *The Physician, stay thy hand!* In: Battin M, Rhodes K and Silver A, *Physician Assisted Suicide: Expanding the Debate*. New York: Routledge; 1998.
- Beschütz L, *De euthanasia medica*. Typis Nietackianis; 1832.
- Bradbury J, *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Warfare*. London: Routledge; 2004.
- Bottiglioni G, *Vita sarda: guida essenziale al folclore e alla lingua di Sardegna*. Milano: Luigi Trevisini; 1825.
- Boudewijns M, *Ventilabrum medico-theologicum*. Antwerp: Cornelius Woons; 1666.
- Bucarelli A, Lubrano C, *Eutanasia ante litteram in Sardegna. Sa Femmina Accabbadòra. Usi, costumi e tradizioni attorno alla morte in Sardegna*. Scuola Sarda; 2003.
- Bussa I, *L'accabadora immaginaria. Una rottamazione del mito*. Cagliari: Edizioni della Torre; 2015.
- Cau E, *Deus ti salvet Maria*. Oristano: S'Alvure; 2005.
- Cavina M, *Andarsene al momento giusto: Culture dell'eutanasia nella storia europea*. Bologna: Il Mulino; 2015.
- Cabiddu A, *Akkabadoras riso sardonico e uccisione dei vecchi sardegnesi*. Quaderni bolotanesi 1989;(15).
- Cinus A, Demontis R, Marini A, Staffa M, *Accabadora mito e realtà. Storia e reperti di un ritrovamento*. Cagliari: Isolapalma; 2021.
- Coltro D, *Dalla magia alla cultura popolare e contadina*. Firenze: Sansoni; 1983.
- Corrain C, Zampini P, *Documenti etnografici e folkloristici nei sinodi diocesani italiani*. Bologna: Forni; 1970.
- Corrain C, Zampini P, *Costumanze superstiziose bolognesi rilevate nel diritto ecclesiastico locale*. Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte; 1971.
- Cosmacini G, *La qualità della medicina tra economia ed etica: una visione*. Milano: Università cattolica del Sacro Cuore; 2007.

- Deidda G, Racconti e luoghi tenebrosi della tradizione popolare sarda. Oliena: Iris Edizioni; 2006.
- Della Maria G, Sas accabadoras. Nuovo bollettino bibliografico sardo 1960;28:23.
- Della Marmora F, Ferrero della Marmora A, Meneghini G, Studiati C, Voyage en Sardaigne, de 1819 à 1825; ou, Description statistique, physique et politique de cette île, avec des recherches sur ses productions naturelles et ses antiquités. Paris: Delaforest; 1826.
- Di Lernia F, Ho perso le parole. Potere e dominio nelle pratiche di cura. Molfetta: La meridiana; 2008.
- Edwardes C, Sardinia, and the Sardes. London: Bentley; 1889.
- Foucault M, La volontà di sapere. Torino: Einaudi, 1976.
- Fowler W, Passing under the Yoke. Class Rewiew 1924;27(2):45-51.
- Frank JP, Sistema complete di polizia medica. Milano: Pirotta e Maspero; 1812.
- Fresi F, L'ultima femina agabbadòra della Gallura. Il messaggero Sardo 1991;6.
- Gimbutas M, The Civilization of the Goddess. New York: Harper; 1991.
- Graziani R, Non-Utopian Euthanasia: An Italian Report, c. 1554. Renaissance Quarterly 1969;22(4):329-333.
- Halliday R, Passing under the Yoke. Folklore 1924;35(1):93-95.
- Harmois AL, Inventaire des grandes haches en pierre trouvées en France, L'Homme Préhistorique, 6-8. Paris: Librairie Universitaire J. Gamber; 1928.
- Hertz R, Death and the right hand. Gran Bretagna: Cohen & West; 1960.
- Lequellec JL, Mégalithes et traditions populaires. La hache et le marteau de vie et de mort. Bull. Soc. Préhist. Fr. 1996;93(3):287-297.
- Lock M, Twice dead: Organ transplants and the reinvention of death. California: University of California Press; 2002.
- Kaufman SR, And a time to die: How American hospitals shape the end of life. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 2005.
- Malossini A, Il dizionario delle superstizioni italiane. Milano: Vallardi A; 2009.
- Nola AM, La nera signora. Antropologia della morte e del lutto. Roma: Newton Compton; 2001.
- Pala PG, Antologia della femina agabbadòra. Luras: Museo Etnografico Galluras; 2010.
- Paleotti G, Episcopale Bononiensis civitatis et dioecesis. Bologna: Benacci Alessandro; 1580.
- Paré A, Oeuvres complètes. Paris: Baillière; 1840.
- Pessina A, Eutanasia. Della morte e di altre cose. Siena: Cantagalli; 2007.
- Pes RM, Corbo B, La "Accabadora": note sull'eutanasia sarda. Scienze dell'interazione; 2011;2:147-150.
- Pitrè G, Usi e costumi del popolo siciliano. Palermo: Il Vespro; 1978.
- Pittau M, Nuovo vocabolario della lingua sarda. Fraseologico ed etimologico. Sestu: Domus de Janas; 2014.
- Reverte Coma JM, Las fronteras de la medicina. Limites éticos, científicos y jurídicos. Madrid- Barcelona: Ediciones Diaz de Santos; 1983.
- Shah A, Mushtaq A, The right to live or die? A perspective on voluntary euthanasia. Pak J Med Sci. 2014;30(5):1159-60
- Sechi S, Su Toccu, morte e usanze funebri a Sindia. Cagliari: TSG; 2002.
- Sirigu P, Il codice barbaricino. Cagliari: La Riflessione; 2007.
- Smyth WH, Sketch of the present state of the Island of Sardinia. London: J. Murray; 1828.
- Tennant R, Sardinia and Its Resources London: Libreria Spithover and Stanford; 1885.
- Toschi P, Il folklore. Roma: Stadium; 1960.
- Turchi D, Ho visto agire s'accabadora, Oliena: Iris; 2008.
- Turchi D, Lo sciamanesimo in Sardegna. Roma: Newton Compton Editori; 1992.
- Wagner ML, Dizionario etimologico sardo. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag; 1960.

Tyndale J W, L'isola di Sardegna. Artizzu L, editor. Nuoro: Ilisso; 2022.

Quesel G, *Dissertatio academica, de pulvinari, morientibus non subtrahendo. Von Abziehung der Sterbenden Haupt-Küssen.* Köln: Jena Ehrlich; 1718.

Vivante A, *Muerte, magia y religion en el folklore.* Buenos Aires: Lajouane; 1953.

Van Gennep A, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain. Du berceau à la tombe.* Paris: Editions A. et J. Picard; 1980.

Varese C, *Folchetto Malaspina. Romanzo storico del secolo XII dell'autore di Sibilla Odaleta.* Milano: Stella; 1839.

Veatch RM, *Death, Dying, and the Biological Revolution. Our Last Quest for Responsibility.* London: Yale University Press; 1976.

Vuiller G, *La Sardegna.* Cagliari: Zonza editori; 2008.

1. Wagner M, *Dizionario etimologico sardo.* Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag; 1960.
2. Nola AM, *La nera signora. Antropologia della morte e del lutto.* Roma: Newton Compton; 2001.
3. Cavina M, *Andarsene al momento giusto.* Bologna: il Mulino; 2015; p. 248.
4. Nola AM, Ref 2.
5. Cavina M, Ref 3.
6. Lequellerc JL, *Mégalithes et traditions populaires. La hache et le marteau de vie et de mort.* Bull. Soc. Préhist. Fr. 1996;93(3):287-297.
7. Corrain C, Zampini P, *Costumanze superstiziose bolognesi rilevate nel diritto ecclesiastico locale.* Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte; 1971.
8. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
9. Corrain C, Zampini P, *Documenti etnografici e folkloristici nei sinodi diocesani italiani.* Bologna: Forni; 1970.
10. Paleotti G, *Episcopale Bononiensis civitatis et dioecesis.* Bologna: Benacci Alessandro; 1580.
11. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
12. Quesel G, *Dissertatio academica, de pulvinari, morientibus non subtrahendo. Von Abziehung der Sterbenden Haupt-Küssen.* Köln: Jena Ehrlich; 1718.
13. Boudewijns M, *Ventilabrum medico-theologicum.* Antwerp: C. Woons; 1666. p. 532.
14. Bresc H, *Le corps souffrant, maladies, et medications.* Nice: Univesità de Nice; 1984.
15. Beschütz L, *De euthanasia medica.* Typis Nietackianis; 1832. p. 48.
16. Frank J P, *Sistema completo di polizia medica.* Milano: Pirotta e Maspero; 1807. p.636 .
17. Joachim GA, Arnold HW, *Dissertatio iuridica de vivi sepultura delicto et poena.* Lopsia: Literis io christiani langenheimii; 1732. p. 44.
18. Corrain C, Ref 7.
19. Paré A, *Oeuvres complètes.* Paris: Baillière; 1840.
20. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
21. Bradbury J, *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Warfare.* London: Routledge; 2004. pp. 392.
22. Reverte Coma JM, *Las fronteras de la medicina. Limites èticos, cientificios y juridicos.* Madrid- Barcelona: Ediciones Diaz de Santo; 1983.
23. Vivante A, *Muerte, magia y religion en el folklore.* Buenos Aires: Lajouane; 1953.
24. Van Gennep A, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain. 1.2. Du berceau à la tombe.* Paris: Editions A. et J. Picard; 1980.

25. Nola MA, Ref. 2. p. 27.
26. Pala PG, *Antologia della femina agabbadòra*. Luras: Museo Etnografico Galluras; 2010.
27. Deidda G, *Racconti e luoghi tenebrosi della tradizione popolare sarda*. Oliena: Iris Edizioni; 2006.
28. Alziator F, *Il Folklore Sardo*. Sassari: La Zattera; 1957.
29. Arras MA, *Accabadora e la sacralità del femminile. Riti e credenze nella tradizione popolare sarda*. Torino: Anake; 2011.
30. Pes RM, Corbo B, La “Accabadora”: note sull’eutanasia sarda. *Scienze dell’interazione* 2011;2:147-150.
31. Turchi D, *Ho visto agire s’accabadora*. Oliena: Iris; 2008.
32. Azara M, *Tradizioni popolari della Gallura: dalla culla alla tomba*. Sala Bolognese: A. Forni; 2005.
33. Pala PG, Ref. 26.
34. Sirigu P, *Il codice barbaricino*. Cagliari: La Riflessione; 2007.
35. Pitre G, *Usi e costumi del popolo siciliano*. Palermo: Il Vespro; 1978.
36. Pala PG, Ref. 26.
37. Coltro D, *Dalla magia alla cultura popolare e contadina*. Firenze: Sansoni; 1983.
38. Pes RM, Ref. 30.
39. Sirigu P, Ref. 34.
40. Fresi F, *L’ultima femina agabbadòra della Gallura*. *Il messaggero Sardo*. 1991.
41. Pala PG, Ref. 26.
42. Turchi D, Ref. 31.
43. Cau E (ed.), *Deus ti salvet Maria*. Oristano: S’Alvure; 2005.
44. Bussa I, *L’accabadora immaginaria. Una rottamazione del mito*. Cagliari: Edizioni della Torre; 2015.
45. Della Maria G, *Sas accabadoras*. *Nuovo bollettino bibliografico sardo* 1960;28:23.
46. Foddai GM, *Accabadora dimensioni tacite del diritto e opera letteraria*. *TCRS* 2023;1-15.
47. Turchi D, Ref. 31.
48. Murineddu G, *L’agabbadòra. La morte invocata*. Roma: Il Filo; 2007.
49. Bucarelli A, Lubrano C, *Eutanasia ante litteram in Sardegna. Sa femmina accabbadòra. Usi, costumi e tradizioni attorno alla morte in Sardegna*. Cagliari: Scuola Sarda; 2003.
50. Pittau M, *Nuovo vocabolario della lingua sarda. Fraseologico ed etimologico*. Sestu: Domus de Janas; 2014.
51. Tyndale JW, *L’isola di Sardegna*. Nuoro: Ilisso; 2022.
52. Tennant R, *Sardinia and Its Resources*. London: Libreria Spithover and Stanford; 1885.
53. Edwardes C, *Sardinia and the Sardes*. London: Bentley; 1889.
54. Vuiller G, *La Sardaigne*. Cagliari: Zonza editori; 2008.
55. Ferrero della Marmora A, Meneghini G, Studiati C, *Voyage en Sardaigne, de 1819 à 1825; ou, Description statistique, physique et politique de cette île, avec des recherches sur ses productions naturelles et ses antiquités*. Paris: Delaforest; 1826.
56. Ibid.
57. Smyth WH, *Sketch of the present state of the Island of Sardinia*. London: J. Murray; 1828.
58. Casalis C, *Dizionario geografico, storico, statistico, commerciale degli stati di SM il re di Sardegna*. Torino: Tipografia Cassone, Marzorati e Vercelloni; 1833.
59. Ibid.
60. Bresciani A, *Dei costumi dell’isola di Sardegna comparati cogli antichissimi popoli orientali*. Napoli: Nel cortile di S. Sebastiano; 1850.



61. Bottiglion G, Vita sarda: guida essenziale al folclore e alla lingua di Sardegna. Milano: Luigi Trevisini; 1825.
62. Pittau M, Ref. 50.
63. Varese C, Folchetto Malaspina. Romanzo storico del secolo XII dell'autore di Sibilla Odaleta. Milano: Stella; 1839.
64. Bucarelli A, Ref 49.
65. Sechi E, Su Toccu, Morte e usanze funebri a Sindia. Cagliari: TSG; 2002.
66. Turchi D, Lo sciamanesimo in Sardegna. Roma: Newton Compton Editori; 1992.
67. Bussa I, Ref. 66.
68. Alziator F, Ref. 28.
69. Alziator F, Tracce di rituali Pagani nella tradizione popolare sarda. Padova: Cedam; 1963.
70. Bussa I, Ref. 44.
71. Casalis C, Ref. 58.
72. Ibid.
73. Cabiddu A, Akkabadoras riso sardonico e uccisione dei vecchi sardegna. Quaderni bolotanesi 1989;15:345.
74. Ferrero della Marmora A, Ref. 55.
75. Smyth W H, Ref. 57.
76. Casalis C, Ref. 58.
77. Bussa I, Ref. 44.
78. Fresi F, Ref. 40.
79. Bucarelli A, Ref. 49.
80. Turchi D, Ref. 66.
81. Casalis C, Ref. 58.
82. Turchi D, Ref. 31.
83. Sechi E, Ref. 65.
84. Fowler W, Passing under the Yoke. Class Rewiew 1924;27(2):45-51.
85. Ibid.
86. Halliday WR, Passing under the Yoke. Folklore 1924;35(1):93-5.
87. Malossini A, Il dizionario delle superstizioni italiane. Milano: Vallardi A; 2009.
88. Toschi P, Il folklore. Roma: Stadium; 1960.
89. Murineddu G, Ref.48.
90. Turchi D, Ref. 31.
91. Bucarelli A, Ref. 49.
92. Cinus A, Demontis R, Marini A, Staffa M, Accabadora mito e realtà. Storia e reperti di un ritrovamento. Monastir: Isolapalma, 2021.
93. Turchi D, Ref. 31.
94. Sechi E, Ref. 65.
95. Lequellec Jean L. Ref. 6.
96. Harmois AL, Inventaire des grandes haches en pierre trouvées en France, L'Homme Préhistorique, 6-8, Librairie Universitaire J. Gamber: Paris; 1928.
97. Corrain C, Ref. 7.
98. Nola A M, Ref. 2.
99. Corrain C, Ref. 7.
100. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
101. Boudewyns M, Ref. 8.
102. Ibid.

103. Bradbury J, Ref. 21.
104. Questel G, Ref. 12.
105. Ibid.
106. Cavina M, Ref 3.
107. Foddai GM, Ref.46.
108. Questel G, Ref. 12.
109. Ibid.
110. Frank JP, Ref. 16.
111. Joachim GA, Ref. 17.
112. Corrain C, Zampini P, Ref. 7.
113. Graziani R, Non-Utopian Euthanasia: An Italian Report, c. 1554. *Renaissance Quarterly* 1969;22(4):329-333.
114. Bradbury J, Ref. 21.
115. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
116. Hertz R, *Death and the right hand*. Gran Bretagna: Cohen & West, copyr, 1960.
117. Ariès, P, *The hour of our death*. New York: Knopf, 1981.
118. Cavina M. Ref. 3.
119. Lock M, *twice dead: Organ transplants and the reinvention of death*. California: University of California Press; 2002.
120. Kaufman SR, *And a time to die: How American hospitals shape the end of life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 2005.
121. Di Lerna F, *Ho perso le parole. Potere e dominio nelle pratiche di cura*. Molfetta: La meridiana; 2008. p. 256.
122. Gimbutas M, *The Civilization of the Goddess*. New York: Harper, 1991.
123. Di Lerna F, Ref. 121.
124. Murineddu G, Ref. 48.
125. Van Gennep A, Ref. 24.
126. Cavina M, Ref. 3.
127. Foucault M, *La volontà di sapere*. Torino: Einaudi, 1976.
128. Kaufman SR, *And a time to die: How American hospitals shape the end of life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 2005.
129. Cosmacini G, *La qualità della medicina tra economia ed etica: una visione*. Milano: Università cattolica del Sacro Cuore; 2007.
130. Pessina A, *Eutanasia. Della morte e di altre cose*. Siena: Cantagalli, 2007.
131. Banović B, Turanjanin V, Miloradović A, *An Ethical Review of Euthanasia and Physician-assisted Suicide*. *Iran J Public Health* 2017;46(2):173-179.
132. Veatch RM, *Death, Dying, and the Biological Revolution. Our Last Quest for Responsibility*. London: Yale University Press, 1976.
133. Shah A, Mushtaq A, *The right to live or die? A perspective on voluntary euthanasia*. *Pak J Med Sci*. 2014;30(5):1159-60.
134. Baumrin B, *Physician, stay thy hand!* In M. Battin, K. Rhodes, and A. Silver, *Physician Assisted Suicide: Expanding the Debate*. New York: Routledge, 1998.