

LORENZA GIANFRANCESCO

Narratives and Representations of a Disaster in Early Seventeenth-century Naples*

Introduction

This essay analyses the development of genres concerned with narratives and representations of catastrophes in early seventeenth-century Naples. The focus here is the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius: unquestionably one of the worst natural disasters in early modern European history. The aim of this essay is to discuss the impact of that eruption in relation to three major themes. First, the role of printed texts and manuscript accounts in positioning the 1631 eruption within a context that linked disasters to religion, politics and science. Second, this essay discusses the existence of conflicting interpretations of the idea of catastrophe that were employed in public religious rituals, mass propaganda and political dissent. Finally, this essay looks at the 1631 eruption as an event that sparked interest in Vesuvius as a subject of multidisciplinary enquiry.

1. Hidden voices: disasters in manuscript culture

In his manuscript diary, possibly written in the mid-seventeenth century, Francesco Bucca recorded memories of details and events that occurred in Naples between 1629 and 1633. In the second volume of his *Giornali historici*, Bucca devoted a few pages to the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius which occurred, as he noted, when he was aged 13.¹ Bucca's recollection of that event, "cosa tanto notabile [...] successa non solo all'età nostra mà per molti secoli andati",

* A version of this paper was read at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference held in Berlin in 2015. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio and Pasquale Palmieri for their friendship and academic rigour. I also wish to express my gratitude to The Johnston Lavis collection, University College London Library, and to Mr. Dan Mitchell for generously allowing publication of the images included in this essay. A special thanks to Ariel Hessayon for his constructive criticism. I should add that this essay has not been translated. I alone am responsible for any mistakes or shortcomings.

1. Biblioteca Nazionale Napoli (hereafter BNN), MS X B 51, Ferrante Bucca, *Giornali historici*, fol. 52^v.

highlighted the catastrophic and yet unfamiliar scale of that eruption.² With a heavy death toll, the devastation of cultivated fields, the death of a large amount of livestock, and the destruction of entire villages around Naples, the 1631 disaster changed the image of Vesuvius for the worse.³ With the exception of the notorious Plinian account of the eruption that occurred in 79 a.C., Vesuvius's history had been barely recorded. Covered with rich vegetation and known for the fertility of its soil, Vesuvius became recognised as a symbol of abundance and beauty “terra fertile sopramodo [con] una varietà di alberi tutti fronduti [...] e carichi di frutti”.⁴ Beyond literary descriptions which had immortalised the Neapolitan volcano within a tradition of Virgilian bucolic poetry, scholars had shown little interest in studying Vesuvius as a subject of historical and scientific enquiry. The limited knowledge of its history was possibly linked to periods of inactivity which may partly explain the few surviving sources on the volcano.⁵ Traditionally regarded as a benign presence, the mountain's sudden awakening in December 1631 exposed people to an unfamiliar type of natural disaster – unlike the earthquakes which regularly shook Naples and indeed most territories within the Kingdom.⁶ As the first of a series of volcanic eruptions that hit Campania throughout the seventeenth century, the 1631 disaster generated a European-wide interest that ranged from literature to science.⁷ That event also occurred in a period during which Naples' position as a prime centre of learning coincided with an unprecedented

2. “A very notable event occurred not only in our age but for many centuries” (*Ibid.*, fol. 48^r).

3. See Antonio Nazzaro, “Implicazioni di una ermeneutica delle fonti vesuviane sull'eruzione del 1631: forma del vulcano e risposta al rischio”, in *Napoli e il Gigante. Il Vesuvio tra immagine, scrittura e memoria*, ed. by Rosa Casapullo and Lorenza Gianfrancesco, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2014, pp. 137-178.

4. “An extremely fertile land with a variety of leafy trees and laden with fruits” (Giulio Cesare Braccini, *Dell'incendio fattosi nel Vesuvio a XVI di dicembre 1631 e delle sue cause ed effetti*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632, pp. 2-3).

5. See Lorenza Gianfrancesco, “Vesuvio e società: informazione, propaganda e dibattito intellettuale a Napoli nel primo Seicento”, in *Napoli e il Gigante*, pp. 77-78.

6. See Giovanni Antonio Foglia, *Historico discorso del gran terremoto successo nel Regno di Napoli*, Naples, Lazarò Scoriggio, 1627; Nazzaro, *Implicazioni di una ermeneutica*, pp. 162-164.

7. During the seventeenth century, Vesuvius erupted in 1637, 1649, 1660, 1682, 1685, 1689, 1694, 1696, 1697 and 1698. See Ignazio Sorrentino, *Istoria del Monte Vesuvio*, Naples, Giuseppe Severini, 1734, vol. II, pp. 111-152; Giovanni Maria Della Torre, *Storia e fenomeni del Vesuvio*, Naples Giuseppe Raimondo, 1755, pp. 62-67; Antonio Bulifon, *Compendio Istorico del Monte Vesuvio*, Naples, Bulifon, 1698, pp. 52-54. Examples of European texts on the 1631 eruption are Gabriel Naudé, *Discours sur les divers incendies du Mont Vésuve, et particulièrement sur le dernier, qui commença le 16 décembre 1631*, Paris, 1632; Martini Opitii, *Vesuvius. Poëma Germanicum*, Breslaw, 1633. On the impact of the 1631 eruption in the Spanish world see Laura Rodríguez Fernández, “Il Barocco spagnolo di fronte al Vesuvio: Juan de Quiñones: El Monte Vesuvio, aora la montaña de Soma”, in *Napoli e il Gigante*, pp. 111-136; Id., *El Vesubio en llamas: un texto napolitano en español sobre la erupción de 1631: Los incendios de la montaña de Soma (Nápoles, 1632)*, Naples, Pironti, 2014. For the linguistic impact of Neapolitan on the terminology adopted in volcanology see Rosa Casapullo, “Note sull'italiano della vulcanologia fra Seicento e Settecento”, in *Napoli e il Gigante*, pp. 13-53.

expansion of the city's printing industry. The large amount of material published in Naples on the disaster also positions the 1631 eruption of Vesuvius as a case study in reconstructing the dynamics of mass communication in early modern Mediterranean Europe.⁸ Within a Neapolitan public sphere, Vesuvius generated a debate that located disasters within a civic, religious, and political dimension. Bucca's narrative embraced an interpretation according to which natural disasters were believed to be a sign of God's wrath against human sins. Descriptions of processions ("con gran moltitudine di popolo"), public preaching, as well as veneration of relics displayed in the city's major churches emphasised the role of devotional practices in coping with a major crisis. In a collective attempt to gain God's benevolence, enactments of religious zeal also manifested through praying, penitence and self-flagellation.⁹ Interpreting the disaster within a chain of cause and effect rooted in the relationship between humans and God was vital to channelling mass obedience at a moment when fear and instability dominated the city of Naples. Moreover, rumours circulated in the city stating that the 1631 eruption had marked the beginning of future sufferings. These would be inflicted upon Neapolitans through "guerre, peste e fame" as part of a chain of calamitous events generated by divine vengeance.¹⁰ Bucca's acceptance of a prevailing religious attitude was matched by references to the propagandistic contents contained in texts "da molti huomini insigni e dati già alle stampe".¹¹ Similarly, Bucca's account reported on the circulation of dissenting interpretations of that catastrophe. He specifically alluded to the existence of a Neapolitan debate that located the eruption within an unorthodox political dimension.¹² Silenced in print culture, these rumours that the eruption of Vesuvius had been caused by Saint Januarius's anger against the conduct of Spanish rulers nonetheless circulated in the city. The insolence of the Infanta Maria Anna of Spain in the course of her stay in Naples in September 1630 had allegedly triggered the Saint's anger.¹³ During her visit to the city's Cathedral to honour Saint Januarius's relics, Maria Anna was disrespectful of etiquette and precedence. Upon demanding that the ceremonial apparatus be rearranged by her guards, Maria Anna "se inginocchiò et, fatta un poco d'orazione, si alzò sub(it)o, andò doppo nel Tesoro Vecchio per visitare li Santi Corpi, senza n'anco aspettar compagnia poco sodisfatta".¹⁴ A few days later,

8. For an analysis of some key sources on the 1631 eruption see Emanuela Guidoboni, "Vesuvius: A historical approach to the 1631 eruption 'cold data' from the analysis of three contemporary treatises", *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, 178 (2008), pp. 347-358. Sources on Vesuvius and the early modern Neapolitan academic milieu are available from "The Italian Academies Database" (www.italianacademies.org). For general information about the project see <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/About.aspx>

9. Descriptions of collective religious rituals appear in many accounts on the 1631 eruption. See BNN, MS X B 51, Bucca, *Giornali historici*, fols. 50^v-53^r.

10. *Ibid.*, fol. 54^v.

11. "Already published my by many illustrious men" (*Ibid.*).

12. *Ibid.*, fol. 48^v.

13. *Ibid.*, fols. 55^{r-v}.

14. "She knelt and, after a brief prayer, quickly stood up and then went to the Old Treasure Chapel to visit the Holy relics, without even waiting for her annoyed accompanying

on 28 September, Maria Anna decided to pay a second visit to Saint Januarius's Cathedral. On being informed by her guards that the Archiepiscopal chair had been positioned above the chair prepared for her, the Infanta "non vi volle entrare, ma fatta voltare la carrozza, dicono andasse a visitare la Gloriosa Vergine del Carmine".¹⁵ Blinded by her power, Maria Anna had challenged the Saint's authority and his holy space. The problems authorities faced during the Infanta's visit to Naples tell a story of diplomatic incidents, breach of ceremonial rules and unnecessary expenditure for public spectacles and courtly entertainment that stirred anti-Spanish sentiments.¹⁶ Maria Anna's unsuccessful visit to Naples was also regarded as an ill-fated sign. Silenced in celebratory accounts of her Italian journey, diplomatic dispatches report on an outbreak of plague which reportedly killed a Tuscan seaman in Naples. It was, however, thanks to the divine protection granted to Neapolitans that "tutto il volgo [fu] impresso che miracolosamente la Beata Vergine promettessi di non lasciarli infettare".¹⁷ The redeeming role of the Virgin of the Carmine in sparing the city from an outbreak of plague in 1630 was inverted a year later by a calamity caused by Saint Januarius's anger directed at Spanish abuse of power. Accordingly, the disaster that hit Naples in 1631 was believed to affirm the superiority of divine forces over secular authority.

Within a context that looked at that eruption as a divine punishment for the misconduct of rulers, Saint Januarius had accomplished what Neapolitans were struggling to achieve against Spanish tyranny. Rumours that the devastation inflicted by Vesuvius was a punishment caused by the faults of others ("questo misero Regno [...] innocente et [...] patisce p(er) castigar nella sua ruina altri che colpano") also strengthened the connection between natural disasters and political oppression.¹⁸ Seen as manifestations of unsolved clashes between people and rulers, catastrophes were also viewed as an opportunity to voice political discontent. The connection between the 1631 eruption and the visit of the Infanta Maria Anna to Naples can be seen as an example of how unsuccessful events – usually of a political nature – were in some cases believed to trigger natural disasters. During the state of emergency that Naples faced from December 1631 until spring 1632, authorities tried to tackle mass protest by maximising their public appearances in processions and churches. State intervention to help civilians and refugees was also implemented by setting

group" (BNN, MS X B 50, Bucca, *Giornali storici delle cose accadute nel Regno di Napoli*, fol. 85^r).

15. "Refused to enter, but having commanded that her carriage change direction, it is said that she went to visit the Glorious Virgin of the Carmine" (*Ibid.*, fols. 90^{r-v}).

16. See Alessandro Fellecchia, *Viaggio della Maestà della Regina di Bohemia e d'Ungheria da Madrid a Napoli*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1630. An example of the lavish entertainment organised at the viceroyal court to honour the Infanta Maria Anna is a Masquerade written and directed by Giambattista Basile: BNN, SQ. 30.B.83, Giambattista Basile, *Monte Parnaso mascarata da' cavalieri napoletani*, Naples, 1630.

17. "People were impressed that the Holy Virgin had miraculously promised them that they would not be infected" (Riksarkivet Stockholm (hereafter RAS), SE/RA/0104/06 Italien 1375-1679, *Di Napoli, li 10 Otto[bre] 1630*).

18. "This Kingdom [is] innocent and suffers as its ruin is a punishment for the misconduct of others" (BNN, MS X B 51, Bucca, *Giornali storici*, fols. 55^{r-v}).

up emergency hospitals on galleons and by ensuring that food would reach the city from various provinces in the Kingdom.¹⁹ This, however, did not prevent disorder. Discontent was often articulated through anonymous compositions written in Neapolitan. Publicly affixed in busy districts, pasquinades functioned as a medium of communication intended to reach the urban public sphere: a tool to alert a wider community where those unable to read could easily capture the language of what was being spread on the streets.

In a letter to his city's Senate, the Venetian ambassador in Naples, Marco Antonio Padavino, referred to a *pasquinata* written soon after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Reacting to the religious interpretation of the eruption, the pasquinade blamed the event on corruption and misgovernment. In a letter dated 6 January 1632, Padavino reported that:

Il viceré ritorna da Pozzuoli e c'è disgusto perché è stato appeso in più luochi cartello in forma di pasquinata. Con maggiore malignità che spirito, in esso si censura la sua persona et tutto il governo. S'intitola *Rel(azione) dell'incendio del Monte di Somma* et si conclude che sia causato dalle rubberie di chi maneggia, per l'ingiustitie di chi giudica, et per gli aggravi caricati al popolo da chi comanda. Il mancamento di molte cose tolte dal fuoco, attribuisce la colpa al V(ice)ré.²⁰

Here the Count of Monterey became the target of people's discontent. As we shall see, the eulogistic tone adopted in printed texts to describe the viceroy as an intercessor to the Virgin was here inverted so that he became the city's enemy. Indeed, his injustice rather than the sins of Neapolitans was blamed for the eruption of Vesuvius. Interestingly, Padavino's reference to the contents of the pasquinade bears a strong resemblance to a Latin composition contained in Bucca's diary. Hence, it is possible that the pasquinade may have originated as a Latin composition intended for restricted circulation.²¹ This may also indicate the existence of an underground milieu engaged in a programme of community outreach aimed at spreading anti-Spanish propaganda. The impact of the pasquinade's political message and the swift reaction of both state and religious authorities in enhancing their public presence indicate that during the 1631 eruption the state lost complete control of society. For a period of at least three weeks beginning from 16 December that year, during which authorities were dealing mainly with the logistics of emergency, some people saw the eruption as an opportunity to

19. Archivio di Stato, Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Dispacci Ambasciatori veneziani a Napoli*, Filza 51, n. 43, fols. 4^v-r.

20. "The viceroy has returned from Pozzuoli and there is disgust because a poster in the form of a pasquinade has been affixed in many places. With more malice than spirit, it censures him and his government. It is titled *On the Eruption of Mount Somma* and concludes that the eruption has been caused by the thefts committed by civic officials, by the injustice of magistrates, and by the heavy taxation imposed by rulers upon the people of Naples. The viceroy has been blamed for the loss of many things saved from the fire" (*Ibid.*, Filza 51, n. 43, fol. 3^v).

21. BNN, MS X B 51, Ferrante Bucca, *Giornali historici*, fol. 60^v. For a discussion on modes of circulation and authorship of satirical political compositions such as *cartelli* and *pasquinades* see Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 136-141.

give voice to their grievances. In the Neapolitan pasquinade, for instance, political discontent was articulated through a parallel between the violence of Vesuvius and the sufferings inflicted upon Neapolitans by Monterey's government:

Lo Vesuvio arraggiato
e Montere' abbrammato.
Non 'ng'è na defferentia fra lloro:
chillo giotte prete, chisto l'oro;
chillo carreia a mare la Montagna,
chisto le gioie e ll'oro porta â Spagna.²²

The unsustainable fiscal pressure imposed on Neapolitans to subsidize Spanish interests was held responsible for impoverishing the population. Political corruption and abuse of power from magistrates and civil officials, as reported in Padavino's letters, were also responsible for exacerbating collective dissatisfaction. Prompted by unbridled corruption and greed, the 1631 eruption established a deep connection between natural disasters and political decadence. Animosity against authorities was also paralleled by the circulation of material that interpreted the eruption as the sign of a coming coup-d'état. Following the 1631 event, Vesuvius's eruptions were frequently linked to instances of political turmoil that troubled Naples throughout the seventeenth century. As Padavino attested, what authorities feared most was mass rebellion. In an attempt to maintain public order, the Venetian ambassador wrote:

Molti espedienti sono stati ricordati, et per me credo che la necessità costringerà ad abbracciarli tutti, et a levare etiando li servigi de' fiscali [...], sperandosi con questo d'evitare il rischio di qualche sollevatione, di che si ha havuto non poco timore.²³

Moreover, it was reported that in January 1632 "broadsides containing astrological prognostications" circulated on the streets of Naples stating that "the year 1632 would be marked by revolutions and radical changes of governments".²⁴ People's reliance upon judicial astrology in connecting *eruttationi e rivolutioni* was described by Padavino as a further threat to the city's political stability. The ambassador's description of Neapolitan streets crowded with 'gullible' people exchanging divergent opinions on the nature of the eruption also provides a glimpse of a Neapolitan public sphere and how news circulated within the city.²⁵

22. "Vesuvius is furious / and Monterey is greedy. / There is no difference between them: / the former divours stones, the latter gold. / The former pulls the mountain towards the sea, / the latter our gold to Spain" (BNN, MS. Branc. D.8., fols. 1^r-2^v). See also Silvana D'Alessio, *Masaniello. La sua vita e il mito in Europa*, Roma, Salerno, 2007, p. 32; Gianfrancesco, "Vesuvio e società", pp. 63-65.

23. "Many solutions have been suggested, and I believe that necessity will force us to implement them all. It is hoped that by suspending the work of tax officials the risk of some upheaval, which is very much feared, can be avoided" (ASV, *Dispacci Ambasciatori veneziani a Napoli*, Filza 51, n. 43, fol. 3^r).

24. *Ibid.*, fol. 3^v.

25. "Li pronostici posti in carta da ingegni disoccupati che l'anno 1632 habbino da succedere rivolutioni et mutationi notabili di stati sono in bocca di tutti, et la prospettiva delle

2. Terra clamat: *Disasters and Revolutions*

In the opening paragraph of a manuscript titled *Prodigiosi portenti del Monte Vesuvio* its author stated that: “Prodigiosa fu giudicata, sciagura mai l'eruttare del Monte di Somma”.²⁶ Attributed to Camillo Tutini and compiled soon after the volcanic disaster that had hit Naples in 1649, this short work provides a brief account of some of Vesuvius’s eruptions from Antiquity to the 1640s.²⁷ Relying upon a range of sources that spanned from Titus Livius to Notar Giacomo’s *Chronicle of Naples* and Ambrogio Leone’s *History of Nola*, the unknown author of this account constructed a parallel between Vesuvius’s eruptions and the political history of Naples. The volcano’s activities were also located within a discourse centred on Naples’ long-standing struggle for independence. Recent scholarship has analysed the symbolic language of volcanoes as a tool to represent “shifting ideas about authority, justice and political virtue”.²⁸ Seen as occurrences intended to alert Neapolitans on the condition of their body politic, Vesuvius’s eruptions were no longer regarded as calamitous events. Rather they were signs of an on-going dialogue between the volcano and the city of Naples. Since the author of *Prodigiosi portenti del Monte Vesuvio* was hostile to foreign domination, he provided an explanation of the catastrophe that shifted the blame from natural to political causes. Consequently, he welcomed Vesuvius’s eruptions as a forewarning of the impending downfall of foreign tyranny.

The aim here was to demonstrate a connection between Vesuvius’s activities and key political events in Neapolitan history. In his *Prodigiosi portenti del Monte Vesuvio*, Tutini argued that between 1037 and 1649 Vesuvius had erupted at the same time as dramatic changes in power. The passage from the Norman Conquest to the Hohenstaufen period, for instance, had supposedly been announced by the eruption of 1190. Thereafter, Tutini noted that the transitions from Angevins to Aragonese and finally Habsburg dominance had been preceded by eruptions that had hit Naples and its vicinities.²⁹ Accordingly, the 1631 eruption was interpreted as a sign of imminent regime change. For Tutini this occurred sixteen years later, for in July 1647 “Napoli si sollevò spingendo i Spagnoli dal governo per sei mesi, havendo i popolani di quella città fatti capi”³⁰

cose del mondo accresce la credenza de' più inclinati et facili a prestar fede a simili sottigliezze” (*Ibid.*, fol. 4^r).

26. “The eruption of Mount Somma has been judged as prodigious and never as a disaster” (BNN, MS Branc. V F 3, *Prodigiosi Portenti del Monte Vesuvio*, fol. 1^r).

27. See D’Alessio, *Contagi. La Rivolta Napoletana del 1647-’48: Linguaggio e Potere Politico*, Firenze, Centro Editoriale Toscano, 2003, pp. 86-87; Sean Cocco, *Watching Vesuvius: A History of Science and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, pp. 118-120.

28. Mary Ashburn Miller, *History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 140.

29. BNN, MS Branc. V F 3, *Prodigiosi Portenti*, fols. 172^r-173^r.

30. “Naples rebelled overthrowing the Spaniards out of government for six months during which the City’s people became the leaders” (*Ibid.*, fol. 173^r).

Assuming that natural disasters were linked to political uprisings, Tutini then turned his attention to the 1649 eruption and the earthquakes that shook Naples. Once again, he interpreted them as signs that radical changes were imminent. Hence, these calamitous events were interpreted as an incitement to Neapolitans to fight Spanish dominance since “quest’altra accensione del Vesuvio [...] ci promette la total cacciata de’ Spagnuoli dal Regno con maggior esterminio delle loro carni di quello [che] hebbero per lo passato e dei traditori della patria”.³¹

Locating volcanic eruptions within the dynamics of human politics modified the notion of natural disasters as they were no longer seen solely as manifestations of divine will. Here the violence of Vesuvius was recognised for its active role in Naples’ long struggle for independence. Hence, the relationship between humans and the environment was believed to be governed by a shared system of values which perceived the violence of nature as a necessary step towards political self-determination.

3. Pleading for help: coping with disasters in peripheral communities

In late December 1631, letters from Apulia were sent to Naples. Written by state officials and addressed to the Viceroy, these letters reported on the damage caused by the eruption of Vesuvius in northern Apulia (then known as *Capitanata* province).³² As well as informing on modes of communication between central authorities and governmental units disseminated throughout the Kingdom, these documents highlight discrepancies between the propagandistic tone of printed sources and the grim contents of manuscript accounts reporting on devastated lands. In relation to the 1631 eruption, this correspondence also informs on the challenges faced by communities living in areas distant from Naples and Campania. Descriptions of raining ash and heavy snow which “darkened the skies and killed the pasture” were held responsible for “causing the impoverishment of farms as well as spreading a collective fear of death and famine”. In the hope that God’s Providence would send “heavy rains to melt the snow that had frozen the fields”, the Apulian letters analysed here stressed reliance upon divine intervention rather than state intervention.³³ In geographically peripheral and yet economically important areas of the Kingdom such as Apulia, state officials sought guidance and ordinances from Naples. Yet, what seems to emerge from these letters is a sense of isolation from the central government that may have been instrumental in shaping an idea of catastrophe that downplayed the role of human agency. The difficulties that Naples and its vicinities faced during and soon after the 1631 disaster played a role in delaying communication between the capital and the

31. “This latest eruption of Vesuvius [...] promises us the final expulsion of the Spaniard from the Kingdom with much extermination of their flesh and that of the traitors of our homeland as that they did [to us] in the past” (*Ibid.*).

32. Archivio di Stato Napoli (hereafter ASN), *Segreterie dei Viceré, viglietti originali*, busta 34, *Lettere da Foggia e Barletta* (dated 22 e 23 December 1631).

33. *Ibid.*, *Lettera da Foggia* (23 December 1631).

provinces. State intervention was mainly focussed on the city so as to provide assistance to the mass of civilians who had fled the villages around Vesuvius to take refuge in Naples. As noted by Padavino, during the eruption:

Da' luoghi vicini al monte fugono le genti et per terra et per mare, altro si può dire non portanto seco che il timore, il tremore. Il spettacolo è grande: corrono le donne con li figliuoli in braccio et a mano, scapigliate, piangendo; molti non sanno dove ricoverarsi. Molte chiese di Napoli sono ripiene, particolarmente il duomo et quella della Beatissima Vergine del Carmine.³⁴

Measures of this kind, albeit insufficient to assist locals and refugees,³⁵ had an effect in channelling perceptions of the role played by the authorities in assisting the population. Conversely, in areas such as Apulia it appears that people hoped that divine Providence alone would stop the disaster that had devastated their land. In disregarding the role of state intervention, this interpretation may also be indicative of how people perceived their government. The lack of state support to communities living in economically crucial areas of the kingdom posed questions on the fragility rather than the strength of the state. It was, perhaps, the lack of expectation from the government that set the tone of the Apulian letters. Rather than a plea for help, it appears that the letters were written to notify central authorities about the damage caused by the 1631 eruption so that “V(ostra) E(ccellenza) acciò resti informata del tutto”.³⁶

As a region extending on both the Adriatic and the Ionian coast, Apulia was located opposite Balkan and Greek territories. This exposed the region to one of the most trafficked and dangerous areas of the Mediterranean. With Venetian cargoes crossing that strip of sea, Spanish galleons patrolling the waters from piracy and the Ottoman threat, shipments of grains that reached the European market from Bari and Capitanata, news from Apulia generated interest that went beyond local contexts.³⁷ Natural disasters affecting this region posed a threat to areas situated close by, such as Venetian Morea. Padavino's correspondence from Naples contains references to “letters from Apulia reporting that raining ash reached Otranto and as far as Corfu”.³⁸ Giving an account of the damage caused

34. “People escape on land and by sea from the places near the mountain. Nothing can be said except that they bring fear and terror with them. The spectacle is extraordinary: women run holding their children in their arms or by hand. They are dishevelled and crying; many don't know where to take refuge. Many churches of Naples are full, the Cathedral in particular, and the church of the Holiest Virgin of the Carmine” (ASV, *Dispacci Ambasciatori veneziani a Napoli*, Filza 51, n. 143, fol. 2^r).

35. A description of refugees trying to enter Naples from the Ponte della Maddalena is in Gian Bernardino Giuliani, *Trattato del Monte Vesuvio e de'suoi incendi*, Naples, Egidio Longo, 1632, pp. 71-2.

36. “So that his High Excellency is fully informed on all matters” (ASN, *Segreterie dei Viceré*, fol. 2).

37. Antonio Calabria, *The Cost of Empire: The Finances of the Kingdom of Naples in the Time of Spanish Rule*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 16-19. For a discussion on the role of the Ottoman threat in Neapolitan hagiographic literature, see Palmieri's contribution to this volume.

38. ASV, *Dispacci Ambasciatori veneziani a Napoli*, Filza 51, n. 147, fol. 2^r.

by the eruption in Apulian territories, Padavino wrote that “most areas of the Kingdom’s pasture remain covered with ashes and it is feared that the most of the harvest will be lost”.³⁹ Concern about the economic impact caused by the natural disaster raised collective fears of death and famine. Due to geographical and cultural unfamiliarity with Vesuvius, communities in non-volcanic areas of the Kingdom faced an unknown type of natural disaster. Unsurprisingly, Padavino’s account of the eruption highlighted that the shock caused by the 1631 eruption was “bigger in the Kingdom than in Naples as people living far from Vesuvius did not know where the rain of ashes came from”.⁴⁰ In a climate of uncertainty and instability, different interpretations of the idea of catastrophe emerged. As discussed above, those who located the eruption within a religious and political framework attributed the disasters to human misconduct. Others, however, saw them as positive signs of imminent radical change. Yet, in both cases, natural disasters were instrumental in shaping a relationship between humans and the environment that was deeply connected with religious identity and political anxieties. In an attempt to tackle forms of dissent and mass protest in Naples the government implemented censorship. In late December 1631 – while Vesuvius was still erupting – state and religious authorities commissioned accounts on the eruption that provided an official narrative of events. As will be analysed in the next section, stringent control and a deal cut between authorities and the city’s publishers promoted the circulation of a large amount of printed material that made the 1631 eruption one of the most documented events in early modern Neapolitan history.

4. Celebrating the city and its heroes: Narratives of a disaster in print culture

During the dark days of the eruption Vincenzo Bove, owner of a bookshop in Naples, was busy recording what he had witnessed. His notes were quickly published as a *Relatione* that became one of the most widely circulated accounts of the eruption.⁴¹ A best seller that reached its tenth edition by mid-January 1632, Bove’s brief work was simultaneously issued by three Neapolitan printers: Lazaro Scoriggio, Egidio Longo and Secondino Roncagliolo. Seeing an opportunity in the market, Bove secured himself the right to sell his account at his own bookshop together with other *relationi* on Vesuvius published in the 1630s.⁴²

Just as Rosa Salzberg has shown for early modern Venice, so Bove’s case is indicative of the wider development of a Neapolitan cheap print industry which was partly concerned with the publication and the propagation of news and daily

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, fol. 1^v.

41. Vincenzo Bove, *Il Vesuvio acceso*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632; Id., *Nuove osservazioni fatte sopra gli effetti dell’incendio del Monte Vesuvio, aggiunte alla decima relatione*, Naples, Lazzaro Scoriggio, 1632.

42. Examples include Marco Antonio Padavino, *Novissima relatione dell’incendio successo nel Monte di Somma a 16 dicembre 1631*, Naples, Egidio Longo, 1632.

events.⁴³ One can only imagine the widespread impact of cheap print informing people of the horror caused by Vesuvius erupting. Nonetheless, Bove's pamphlet was hardly the only source available on the market. In the months following the eruption, the Neapolitan publishing industry enjoyed a prosperous moment. Customers ranged from scholars to the uneducated to whom short texts were read within an emerging practice of shared consumption.⁴⁴

In a milieu where academies, artists and scholars competed for patrons' commissions, printing workshops in the city had tight deadlines to issue material on Vesuvius.⁴⁵ In financial terms, printers and book sellers benefitted from the eruption. From short *relationi* to lengthier treatises, which appeared on the market from spring 1632,⁴⁶ material on Vesuvius began circulating beyond Naples. Some texts were also translated into foreign languages thus constituting the source for newsletters that circulated throughout Europe.⁴⁷ As recently argued by Sean Cocco, "*relationi* [...] transformed calamity into news, chronicle, and explanation".⁴⁸ Such material ranged from cheap print to works of prose and poetry, as well as scientific treatises that encouraged a European-wide debate on disciplines such as astrology, volcanology, geology and seismology.⁴⁹ What is more, the profitable

43. See Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City. Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014, pp. 46-65 in particular.

44. An example of a text possibly written as an oral performance is Giulio Cesare Papaccio, *Relazione del fiero e iracondo incendio del Monte Visuvio, flagello occorso a sedici di dicembre 1631 nella Montagna di Somma, in ottava rima*, Naples, Domenico Maccarano, 1632. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between print and audience see Domenico Cecere's contribution to this volume. Also, Domenico Cecere, "Informare e stupire. Racconti di calamità nella Napoli del XVII secolo" in *L'europa moderna e l'antico Vesuvio*, ed. by Alfonso Tortora, Domenico Cassano, Sean Cocco, Battipaglia, Laveglia Carloni, 2017, pp. 63-77.

45. For a detailed study of early modern Neapolitan academies see the Italian Academies Database (www.italianacademies.org). For a bibliography on the 1631 eruption see Federigo Furchheim, *Bibliografia del Vesuvio*, Lodi, Zazzera, 1991. A discussion on artistic representations of Vesuvius eruptions is in Stefano Causa, "Vesuvio, ancora tu? Divagazioni per immagini sotto il vulcano", in *Napoli e il Gigante*, pp. 204-205; Francesco Lofano, "L'eruzione del Vesuvio del 1631 e Nicola Perrey. Novità e riflessioni sul percorso di un mal noto incisore", in *Napoli e il Gigante*, pp. 209-214; Emanuela Guidoboni, "When Towns Collapse: Images of Earthquakes, Floods, and Eruptions in Italy in the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries", in *Wounded Cities: The Representation of Urban Disasters in European Art (14th-20th Centuries)*, ed. by Marco Folin and Monica Preti, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2015, pp. 49-52.

46. The most known examples are Giuliani, *Trattato* and Giulio Cesare Braccini, *Dell'incendio fattosi nel Vesuvio*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632.

47. See *The continuation of our forraine intelligence, since the 3 of the last to this present. Containing many remarkable passages, amongst the rest these following. A more exact relation of the fearfull burning of the hill Soma nere Naples then the former, with the effects it hath wrought in that citie upon the publicke harlots as well as other people*, London, Nath Butter and Nicolas Bourne, 1632, pp. 4-6.

48. Cocco, *Watching Vesuvius*, p. 73.

49. For a discussion of the scientific debate generated by the 1631 eruption see Ibid., pp. 79-112; Gianfrancesco, "Vesuvio e società", pp. 77-84; Jane Everson, "The melting pot of science and belief: studying Vesuvius in seventeenth-century Naples", *Renaissance Studies*, 26/5 (2012), pp. 691-727.

business generated by the large production of texts on the 1631 disaster constituted an opportunity to temporarily resolve long-term friction between Neapolitan printers and the local Curia. The existence of cases concerned with denunciations and petitions against edicts that had granted archiepiscopal authorities the right to search “stamperie e librerie” as well as issue licenses to print, sheds light on the strict control exercised on the activities of Neapolitan printers.⁵⁰ Petitions to the authorities to grant licence to issue, for example, “historie de havisi et cose occorse” [“newsbook accounts”] or details of court cases such as “allegationi in iure” also highlight government’s concerns about the destabilising impact of news circulation.⁵¹ We have seen how pasquinades and the circulation of unorthodox material on the eruption prompted authorities to implement controls on the city’s book market. Their aim was to commission accounts on the eruption that were in line with propaganda policies and public expectations. Hence, an agreement between printers and censors secured the *imprimatur* to a large amount of texts which eulogised the action of the state and the church in providing practical support to civilians whilst acting as intercessors to appease divine anger.

Texts ranged from *relationi*, which I believe are the earliest examples of journalism in Neapolitan print culture, to academic treatises on Vesuvius. Commissioned by authorities in cheap and accessible format, Neapolitan *relationi* provided a narrative that claimed, in their authors’ words, to combine “personal observation with information gathered from people of trust”.⁵² The simple linguistic register of these short texts contributed to their successful circulation. Written by authors from different backgrounds, short accounts provided accessible information to all. The central role given in these texts to religious or political leaders such as the viceroy or the city’s cardinal also informs us about the dynamics of patronage and censorship in early modern Naples. Vincenzo Bove’s successful *relatione*, for instance, was a eulogy to Cardinal Francesco Boncompagni. Dedicated to Abbott Orazio Rovito, Bove’s account portrayed Neapolitan society as acting cohesively through rituals of collective devotion presided over by the city’s cardinal. Acting as an intercessor to Saint Januarius, Boncompagni organised a procession that gathered “the entire city of Naples”. Formed of people crying out for forgiveness, prostitutes marching in white sack-cloths (having cut their hair as a sign of penitence) and children silently holding candles, the crowd proceeded united from the Annunziata’s church towards Capuana gate. In an act that confronted the violence of natural disasters with the strength of faith, “Boncompagni raised the ampoules containing the blood and the relics of Saint Januarius towards the erupting mountain [which] turned its fury from the city towards the sea”.⁵³ Conversely, Giovanni Geronimo Favella’s account of the eruption was commissioned under the auspices of the Spanish authorities in Naples. Appointed as “writer of gazettes

50. ASN, *Delegazione della Real Giurisdizione*, vol. 182, *Suppliche varie degli stampatori napoletani alla Corte Arcivescovile*, fol. 3.

51. *Ibid.*, fol. 6.

52. Gio. Geronimo Favella, *Abbozzo delle ruine fatte dal Monte di Somma con il seguito infino ad oggi 23 di gennaro 1632*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632.

53. Bove, *Nuove osservazioni fatte sopra gli effetti dell’incendio del Monte Vesuvio*, p. 18.

and news” by viceroy Monterey”,⁵⁴ Favella’s account of the eruption centralised the role of Monterey in saving Naples from the violence of Vesuvius. Within a narrative that perceived viceroys as embracing the values of Spanish kingship,⁵⁵ the count of Monterey became a symbol of bravery who “went to church where he, having refused the cushions that had been offered to him, knelt humbly before the holy Virgin to implore for the salvation of Neapolitans”⁵⁶. The narrative of these texts also looked at disasters as being generated by human misconduct. Through an emotional narrative intended to appeal to the reader’s conscience, words offered a vision of devastated land with carcasses and scalded corpses left unburied.⁵⁷ Accounts of the city’s authorities ordering that “dead animals be buried to preserve the air from being infected” made the reader imagine the smell of contaminated air.⁵⁸ Narrations of collective hysteria and cathartic religious rituals made the reader hear the voices of sufferers imploring God for forgiveness.⁵⁹ Similarly, descriptions of “a burnt spongy substance” that was identified as human flesh, made the reader visualise images of death and decomposition.⁶⁰ Here the idea of catastrophe was also accentuated by descriptions of refugees entering the city of Naples. Mothers dragging their terrified children, men carrying on their shoulders their poor belongings, and wounded people begging for help were recurrent tropes in texts on the 1631 eruption.⁶¹ Such accounts also reported on the disastrous situation of villages situated around Vesuvius. In a journey to some of the destroyed villages, Padavino had a taste of what the fury of Vesuvius had left behind. Upon arriving in Torre del Greco, he reported that:

Quivi un miscuglio incomprendibile mirai di corpi humani squarciati in molti pezzi, e di diversi animali, fra arbori, porte, finestre, banchi, matarazzi, vestiti, sgabelli, seggie, botte, casse, rovine; & altre infinite cose in parte sepolte nelle ceneri. Molto si può dire di quest’horribile spettacolo, ma esprimerlo a sufficienza è impossibile. Io mi figurai in tanta confusione e meschianza di cose un vero ritratto del Caos.⁶²

54. Antonio Cirillo, *Napoli ai tempi di Giambattista Vico*, Naples, Tempo Lungo, 2000, p. 125; Gianfrancesco, “Vesuvio e società”, p. 70.

55. For a discussion of kingship in Hapsburg Spain see John H. Elliott, *Spain and its World. 1500-1700*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 142-50.

56. Favella, *Abbozzo*, p. 5.

57. Padavino, *Novissima relatione*, sig. A7v-A8r.

58. British Library (hereafter BL), Add MS 8353, Antonio Gerardi Romano, *Relatione dell’horribil caso & incendio occorso per l’escalatione del Monte di Somma, detto Vesuvio, vicino la città di Napoli*, Naples-Genoa-Rome, Giuseppe Pavoni, 1632, sig. A3r.

59. Giuliani, *Trattato*, pp. 107-108.

60. Padavino, *Novissima relatione*, sig. A6v.

61. Giuliani, *Trattato*, pp. 71-73; Giulio Cesare Braccini, *Dell’incendio fattosi nel Vesuvio a XVI di dicembre MDCXXXI e delle sue cause ed effetti*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632, p. 45; Nicolo Maria Oliva, *La ristampata lettera [...] nella quale si dà vera & minuta relatione degli segni, terremoti & incendij del Monte Vesuvio [...]*, Naples, Secondino Roncagliolo, 1632, sig. A3r.

62. “In this place I saw an incomprehensible jumble of human corpses ripped open in many pieces and of many animals laid between trees, doors, windows, benches, mattresses, clothes, stools, chairs, chests, barrels and rubble; not to mention many other things partly buried by the ash. Much more may be said about that horrible spectacle, but it is impossible to express

The realistic tone employed in printed texts to describe the scale of the 1631 disaster was also set within a context that looked at the violence of Vesuvius from a religious angle. Seen as manifestations of a godly design to punish spiritual corruption, cataclysms impelled people to repent their sins. Descriptions of collective rituals of religious penitence, self-flagellation and praying united the population in regaining divine benevolence.⁶³ Thus, Vesuvius also became a subject of sacred literature in pamphlets, orations, prayers, and sacred performances.

5. From sin to salvation

Partenope, Partenope incostante,
che lasciasti del Ciel la ditta via,
ecco ch'a te discende oggi Maria
accio che per mio amore
volgi di nuovo a penitenza il core.⁶⁴

The 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius can also be considered as a case study of millenarianism in early modern Mediterranean Catholicism. The eschatological dimension of millenarianism is expressed through the idea of a final event, “in which the earthly world is consumed in purifying fires” with individuals destined to salvation or damnation.⁶⁵ Millenarian expectations also imply “the coming of a new world of justice which appears on earth and marks a messianic age of abundance and the joy of fellowship”⁶⁶ In early modern Naples, reactions to the 1631 eruption embraced a millenarian dimension of both a religious and political nature. We have seen how in some manuscript accounts Vesuvius was at the core of a politically subversive programme which employed the rhetoric of millenarianism.

In Tutini's *Prodigi portenti*, for instance, volcanic eruptions were interpreted as premonitory signs of an imminent transformation that would bring justice, peace and political freedom. Within the ideologically regulated narrative of printed literature, however, the 1631 eruption remained a primarily religious event. Descriptions of collective fears were paired by interpretations of the

it sufficiently. I found myself greatly confused, for such things were a true portrait of Chaos” (Padavino, *Novissima relatione*, sig. A7^r).

63. Descriptions of collective religious rituals are reported in different sources: from brief accounts to lengthier texts on the 1631 eruption. See, for example, Giuliani, *Trattato*, pp.107-110.

64. “Parthenope, Parthenope inconstant / you left the right path of Heaven, / today Mary descends upon you / so that you move your heart to penance again to show your love for me”, University College London Library (hereafter UCL), The Johnston Lavis collection, Special Collections. (GL-1632-G5, Anonimo, *L'incendio del Monte Vesuvio. Rappresentazione spirituale composta da un devoto sacerdote*, Naples, Lazaro Scoriggio, 1632, p. 183).

65. Richard Landes, “Millenarianism and the Dynamics of Apocalyptic Time”, in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, ed. by Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben, Waco, Texas, Baylor University Press, 2006, p. 7.

66. *Ibid.*

disaster as a prophetic sign.⁶⁷ The belief that the eruption had been preceded by premonitory signs was also interpreted as a warning of a far greater imminent misfortune sent by God to humans. Visions of “sudden darkness, rains of ashes and thunders that resembled the rumble of artillery made people believe that the end of the world was coming”⁶⁸. Preachers sermonising the day of Judgement also provided an apocalyptic scenario “for which everyone was preparing”⁶⁹. The explosions of Vesuvius were described as “infernal roars”; the tongues of fire and the earthquakes that destroyed lands and villages resembled descriptions of a coming end of history.⁷⁰ Anonymous accounts preaching against sin “acciò [...] non siamo condannati in perpetuo in semiperni ardori” warned Neapolitans on the danger of perpetual damnation.⁷¹

Interestingly, this frame of mind conformed to the general picture of European Christian millenarianism, both Catholic and Protestant. As Ariel Hessayon has noted of early modern England, “portents could be natural phenomena such as earthquakes, storms and the like, or apparitions in the heavens” such as “new stars, comets and eclipses”⁷². Similarly, as Alexandra Walsham has argued with regard to providence in early modern England, “Portents were the danger signals of “domb warnings of a world in moral crisis and on the verge of mechanical collapse”⁷³. Things were the same in Naples.

In a long letter sent from Naples to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, its author (a Carthusian friar named Don Severo), mentioned several premonitory signs (“Segni e pronostici del cielo”) that had been observed shortly before the eruption.⁷⁴ In October 1631, for instance, a cold tramontane wind hit Naples causing an unusual climatic change and a sudden drop in temperature.⁷⁵ A month

67. As the Jesuit father Giulio Cesare Recupito stated in his account of the eruption: “la terra con tremuoti, l’aria con piogge di sassi e di ceneri, il fuoco con incendio, l’acqua con diluvio, accioché quindi noi prendessimo un saggio dell’ultima giornata del mondo e degli ultimi contrassegni dello sdegno divino” (Giulio Cesare Recupito, *Avviso dell’incendio del Vesuvio*, Naples, Egidio Longo, 1635, pp. 86-87).

68. Ascanio Rocco, *Oratione devotissima alla Gloriosa Vergine Maria dell’Arco* (dated S. Anastasia, 20 January 1632), s.e., sig. A9^v.

69. *Ibid.*

70. BL, Add MS 8353, Romano, *Relatione*, sig. A2^{r-v}.

71. “So that we are not condemned to eternal suffering” (Anonimo, *Breve narratione de’ meravigliosi esempi occorsi nell’incendio del Monte Vesuvio, circa l’anno 1038, per profitto & edificatio de’ fedeli*, Naples, Matteo Nucci, 1632, sig. A4^v).

72. Ariel Hessayon, ‘*Gold Tried in the Fire*’. *The Prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 131-133. See also Kocku Von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2010, p. 152.

73. Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 169. See also chapter 4, pp. 166-224.

74. “Signs and prognostications from the sky” (Bibliothèque Méjanes, Aix-en Provence (hereafter BMAP), MS 212 (1030), Correspondance littéraire de Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc avec les savants de son temps, Fond Peiresc, *Lettera di Don Severo di Napoli Cartusino a il Sigre De Peiresc, da S^e Martino*, Napoli, li 27 di marzo 1632).

75. Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: Wars, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 3-8.

later, Don Severo reported, a comet was seen around Vesuvius. Those signs were interpreted as part of a broader succession of calamitous events as “nel fine di quest’anno non restasse in Italia, Regno e provincia esente da qualche calamità [...], chi da guerra et chi da peste [...], e in questo Regno e provincia la sciagura dell’incendio presente”.⁷⁶ Even when assessed through the filter of science, comets, stars, earthquakes or eclipses were seen as a judgement on a “general Corruption of Manners” which could only be stopped through expiation.⁷⁷

In scientific literature on Vesuvius published in Naples, the discussion on the eclipse that darkened the skies in October 1631 followed this line of interpretation. Astrologers such as Filippo Finella and Giovanni Francesco Porrata Spinola analysed the eclipse as being caused by the position of celestial bodies. The transit of Mars through Leo (both dominated by fire) was deemed responsible for the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.⁷⁸ In analysing the reasons for the salvation of Naples, however, the pressure exerted by censorship shaped a narrative that looked at prodigies as tools through which “*Deus voluntatem suam explicat*”.⁷⁹ Hence the central role played by rituals of penitence and collective expiation to gain God’s benevolence as “per i gran peccati giustamente doveva aprirsi la terra et in ing[hi]iuttireci vivi?”.⁸⁰

It was in this context that Vesuvius became a subject of religious literature. Texts of prayers, for instance, constitute a valuable source for understanding issues related to collective anxiety, fear, and expectations. Moreover, during the eruption religious broadsides circulated in churches and private houses. In a flier called *Remedio divotissimo contro terremoto, fulguri, saette &c.* Neapolitans were advised to display a particular prayer on their doors, windows and walls. In this fourteen-line prayer, the voice of God assures people not to fear, but have faith in his protection.⁸¹ This is followed by the voice of believers asking for God’s mercy. The concluding lines show the apotropaic function of prayers. Determined to fight the destructive force of natural disasters through their faith, Neapolitans

76. “By the end of this year no kingdom or province within Italy would be exempt from some calamity, from war and from plague [...], and in this province within the kingdom the calamity is this present eruption” (*Lettera di Don Severo*, fols. 185-186).

77. The reference is to John Ray, an English naturalist who located a scientific study of earthquakes within a religious context. See Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 177. Apetrei also discusses how in late seventeenth-century English Presbyterianism natural disasters “warned of a far greater calamity which could only be prevented by National Repentance, and Reformation”. See Apetrei, *Women*, pp. 177-178.

78. Filippo Finella, *Incendio del Vesuvio del Lanelfi*, Naples, appresso Ottavio Beltrano, 1632, sig. A8^r; Giovanni Francesco Porrata Spinola, *Discorso sopra l’origine de’ fuochi gettati dal Monte Vesevo, ceneri piovute, et altri successi, & pronostico d’effetti maggiori*, Lecce, Pietro Micheli Borgognone, 1632.

79. Athanasius Kircher, *Diatrabe. De prodigious Crucibus, quae tam supra vestes hominum, quam res alias, non pridem post ultimum incendium Vesuvij Montis Neapoli comparverunt*, Rome, Vitale Mascardi, 1661, p. 85.

80. “For our great sins the earth should have rightly opened to swallow us alive” (BMAP, Fond Peiresc, Ms 212 (1030), *Lettera*, fols. 199^r).

81. UCL, Johnston Lavis Collection R2- 19, *The most devout remedy against earthquake, thunderbolt, lightning, etc*, fol. 1.

displayed the protective words of this old prayer to push away adversity (*Ecce Crucem Domini fugite Partes adversae*).⁸² At the end of a two-week eruption which also witnessed earthquakes and a tidal wave that caused environmental disaster, Naples was spared from destruction. Some scientists explained Naples' good fortune as the result of the geomorphology of the city and consequently were forced to do so clandestinely. Nonetheless, all Neapolitans, including these dissenting scientists, attributed some role to Saint Januarius' intervention in imploring God's forgiveness. Reasons of space preclude lengthier treatment of this point, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁸³

In the aftermath of Vesuvius's eruption moral values were reasserted. This cathartic process of collective devotion re-established a covenant between Neapolitans and God. From desperation to miracles and finally hope Neapolitans looked at the 1631 eruption as an event that had strengthened their core civic values: obedience to God and the state. Months after the eruption, representations of Parthenope redeemed featured in many works of literature. She was a siren and the symbol of Naples. In July 1632 Lazzaro Scoriggio published a religious play titled *L'incendio del Monte Vesuvio*.⁸⁴ This play features Parthenope facing the violence of Vesuvius, Etna, and demonic forces. After a strenuous fight against evil and corruption, it ends with Parthenope kneeling before the Virgin of the Carmine. Surrounded by a choir of angels and sirens, the city makes her oath to maintain faith and obedience to her divine protectors. Stating that human misconduct is the only cause of disasters, the Virgin warns Naples to maintain her moral integrity as:

Se ritorni a peccar, queste saette
faran del mio Figliuolo aspre vendette.
Vedi che spiran peste e fame e guerra:
se di lor pensi e temi, il cor non erra.⁸⁵

6. Conclusion

This essay has discussed the multifaceted impact of the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The array of interpretations generated by such a traumatic event positioned the catastrophe within a scholarly, political, and religious framework.

82. *Ibid.* See also Rocco, *Oratione Devotissima*; Nicola Addato, *Operetta Spirituale. Sopra il grande prodigo operato dal Glorioso S. Gennaro con averci liberato dall'orrendo incendio del Vessuvio*, Naples, Troise, s.d.; Gianfrancesco, "Vesuvio e società", p. 74, n. 41.

83. Biblioteca Ursino Recupero, Catania (hereafter BURC), MS. E.20.32, Giovanni Tommaso Giovino, *Lettione academica dell'incendio e terremoto di Somma fatta nell'Academia dell'Infuriati di Napoli, da Gio(van) Tomaso Giovino dottor di filosofia e medicina academico prima nell'Otiosi e poi nell'Infuriati, nell'anno 1632*; Gianfrancesco, "Vesuvio e società", pp. 82-84.

84. UCL, Johnston Lavis Collection (GL-1632-G5), Anonimo, *L'incendio del Monte Vesuvio. Rappresentazione spirituale*.

85. "If you sin again, these thunderbolts / will be my son's harsh vengeance. / They bring plague and famine, and war: / If you think of them and fear them, you heart will not be mistaken" (*Ibid.*, p. 184).

The sudden awaking of the ‘Neapolitan mountain’ in 1631 also changed the image of Vesuvius from being a bucolic and fertile place into a living force capable of destroying and killing. The emergence of a new understanding of the nature of disasters deeply changed the relationship between Neapolitans and their environment. From a political angle, the eruption gave voice to state propaganda as much as dissent. As we have seen, during the acute crisis that hit Naples between December 1631 and early January 1632 authorities disseminated propaganda and implemented censorship to keep control of society. Yet the city’s political instability created a space for those voices interpreting the eruption as a call for a radical solution to Naples’ political servitude. My analysis of the impact of the 1631 eruption of Vesuvius has shown that besides its unquestionable magnitude, which left a large number of people destitute, the eruption also became an opportunity to give voice to political dissent. Hence, the impact generated by this event pre-dates Geoffrey Parker’s argument that the revolt of Masaniello in 1647 should be interpreted as Naples’ strongest collective response against Spanish rule. Although that revolt did succeed in overthrowing the Spanish government for a brief period and should be located within a larger trend that saw Europe burdened by a series of mass revolts, it was the 1631 eruption that strengthened the role of the Neapolitan masses as active agents of political dissent.⁸⁶

As I have suggested in this essay, natural catastrophes were also seen as indicative of a crisis that had fractured community cohesiveness and its reliance upon a shared system of ethical, civic and religious values. Hence, the sufferings brought by natural disasters mirrored a corruption of manners that was held responsible for divine wrath. The 1631 eruption also became an instrument to reassess the relationship between Neapolitans and God. In a collective rather than individual context, the city’s community tried to overcome guilt, fear and sorrow through public religious rituals. In addition, collective devotion became a preventative strategy. Indeed, it conveyed a portrait of how the city should function in recognition of the civic and communal values that had previously granted Naples divine protection throughout its history. Collective devotion was the tool through which the community of Naples regained its identity. In this context, disasters like the 1631 catastrophic eruption of Vesuvius fulfilled their cathartic function: eradicating disorder and decadence, thereby establishing the basis for a new beginning.

86. Parker, *Global Crisis*, pp. 425-431.

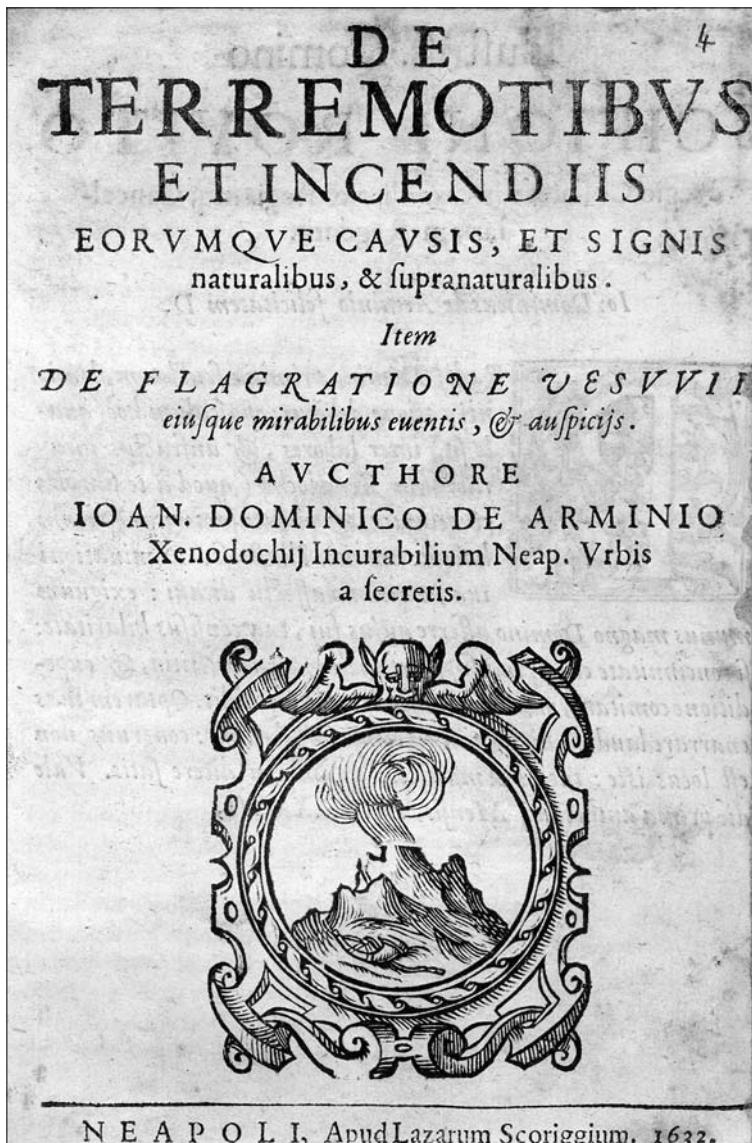


Fig. 1. Ioan. Dominico De Arminio, *De terremotibus et incendiis eorumque causis, et signis naturalibus & supranaturalibus. Item de flagrati one Vesuvii eiusque mirabilibus eventis & auspicijs*, frontispiece. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. The Johnston Lavis collection, Shelfmark: JL R2 1-20 (4).

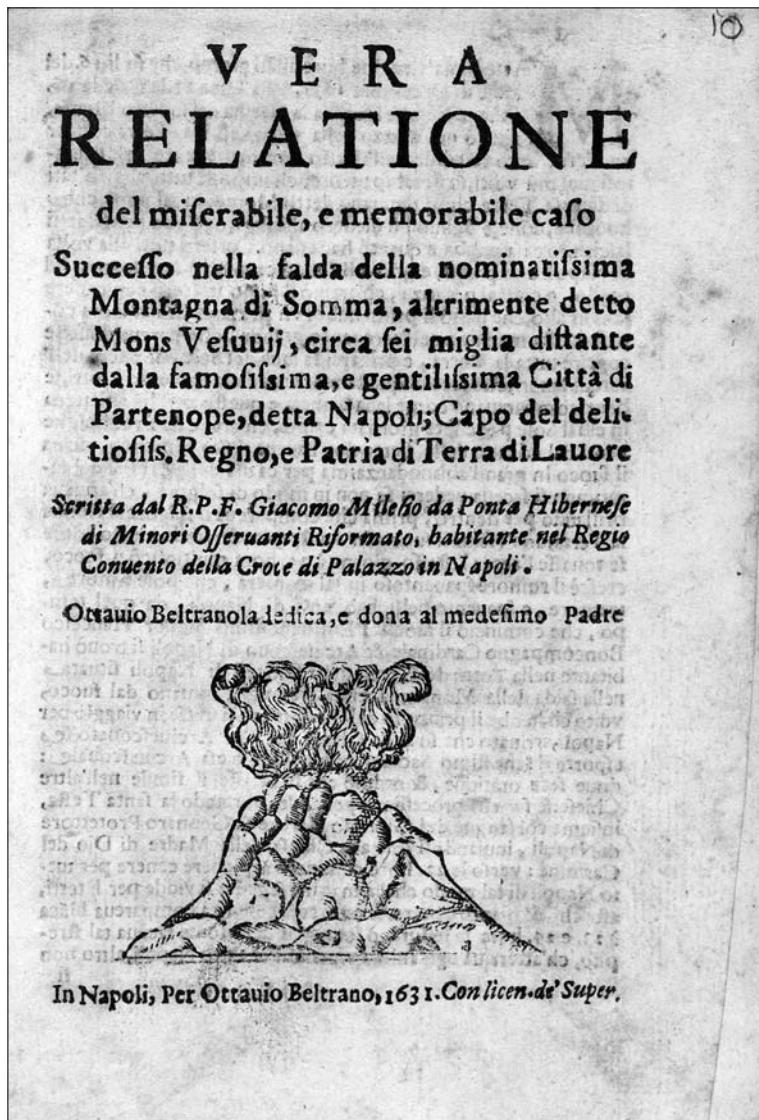


Fig. 2. Giacomo Milesio, *Vera relatione del miserabile e memorabile caso successo nella falda della nominatissima Montagna di Somma, altrimenti detto Mons Vesuvij, circa sei miglia distante dalla famosissima e gentilissima città di Partenope, detta Napoli; Capo del delitiosissimo Regno e Patria di Terra di Lavore*, frontispiece. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. The Johnston Lavis collection, Shelfmark: (JL R2 1-20 (20)).



Fig. 3. Giacomo Milesio, *Vera relatione del miserabile e memorabile caso successo nella falda della nominatissima Montagna di Somma, altrimenti detto Mons Vesuvij*, circa sei miglia distante dalla famosissima e gentilissima città di Partenope, detta Napoli; Capo del delitosiss(imo) Regno e Patria di Terra di Lavore, colophon. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. The Johnston Lavis collection, Shelfmark: (JL R2 1-20 (20).

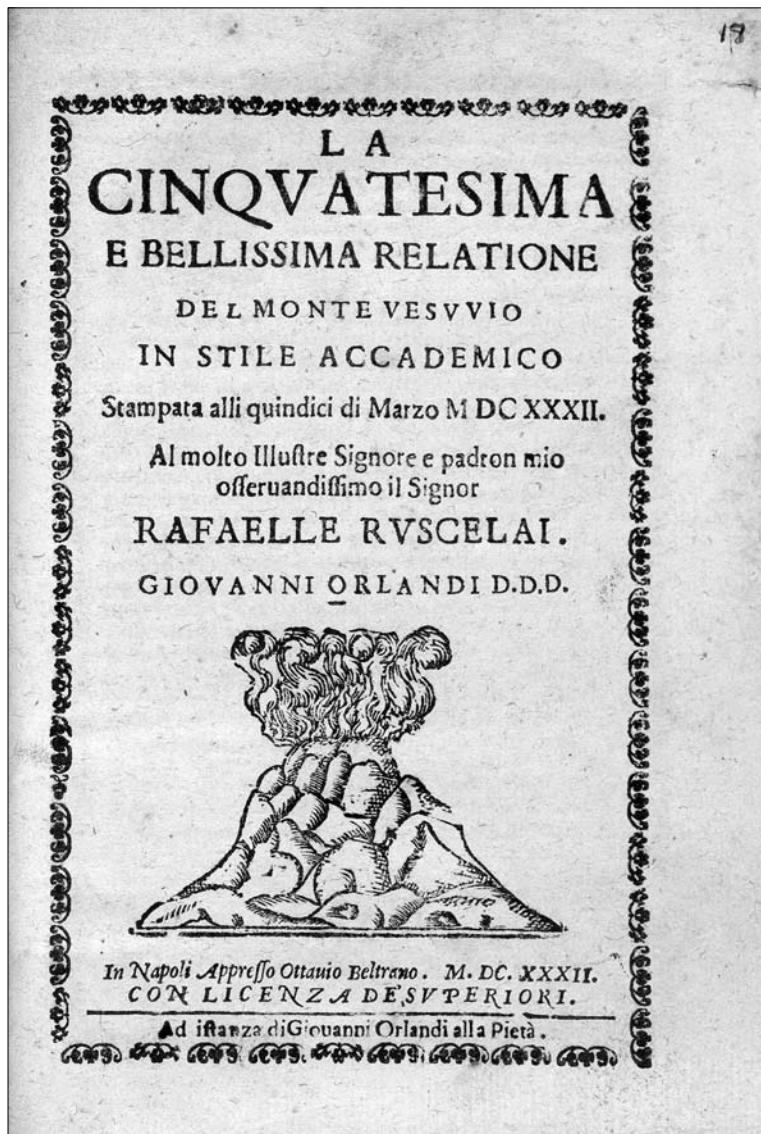


Fig. 4. Rafaelle Ruscelai, *La cinquantesima e bellissima relatione del Monte Vesuvio in stile accademico*, Napoli, Ottavio Beltrano, 1632, frontispiece. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. The Johnston Lavis collection, JL R2 1-20 (18).

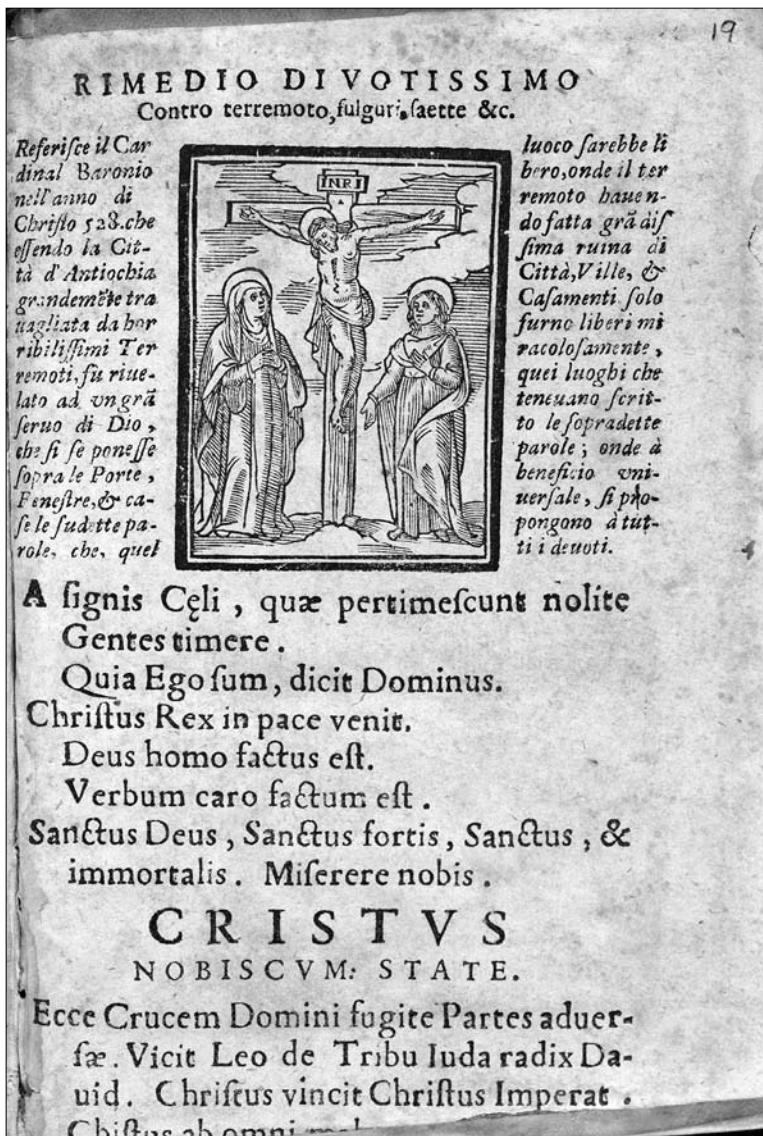


Fig. 5. Anonymous, *Rimedio divotissimo contro terremoto, fulguri, saette &c.*, frontispiece. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. Shelfmark: The Johnston Lavis collection, Shelfmark: (JL R2 1-20 (19)).



Fig. 6. Anonymous, *L'incendio del Monte Vesuvio. Rappresentazione spirituale*, Napoli, Lazar Scoriggio, 1632 frontispiece. By permission of UCL Library, Special Collections. Shelfmark: The Johnston Lavis collection, Shelfmark: JL. 1632 G5.