Dealing with disaster: historical perspectives

Mary Laven, Jesus College Cambridge
Tolentino, dramma in centro: “quasi la metà delle case potrebbe essere inagibile”
Basilica of San Nicola, Tolentino, Marche
Tolentino, 16th century
Tolentino, 1523
Tolentino, 1537

Maestro Francisco Magnano cleaning an arquebus burned his hand and, recommending himself, was liberated. 1537
Collapsing houses, Tolentino, 17th C
St Nicholas protects the citizens of Tolentino from the earthquake of 1703
DOMESTIC DEVOTIONS
The Place of Piety in the Italian Renaissance Home, 1400-1600
The flight of the Holy House of Loreto
Santa Casa di Loreto
Translatio miraculosa ecclesie beate Marie virginis de Loreto.
Augustine of Cremona was at Catara a Cittie of Dalmatia, the yeare 1563. in the beginning of June; at which time a great earth-quake swallowed and overthrew good part of the Cittie ... Wherby Augustine being partaker of the common danger, implored the help of our B. Ladie of Loreto. Neither in vaine. For although he was beaten downe with the suddaine fall of a wall, yet his clothes onely were tore, & his skinne some thing bruized. Wherupon all thinking him to be dead, by and by, by the protection of our B. Ladie, he was safe and sound; whose preservation, the foule and miserable death of others, who were in like danger, made more notable.
Carlo Crivelli (about 1430/5–about 1494) 'The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius', 1486 Egg and oil on canvas, 207 x 146.7 cm NG739
Madonna del Terremoto
1467
Panel, 40 x 53 cm
Archivio di Stato, Siena
Anonymous draftsman. Earthquake of 1505, Bologna

From Fabrizio Nevola, ‘Picturing earthquakes in Renaissance Italy’, in Schenk and Juneja, eds, Disaster as Image, 2014
Account of earthquake that hit Ferrara, 16 November 1570, Stefano Breventano Ms Bibl. Ambrosiana.

‘The principal cause of an earthquake is God’
On 26 March, a Wednesday, at the hour of 20 ¾ [about 3 hours before sunset], the weather being somewhat unsettled, a mighty earthquake came suddenly upon this city of Venice. It seemed as though the houses were collapsing, the chimneys swaying, the walls bursting open, the bell-towers bending, objects in high places falling, water boiling, even in the Grand Canal, as though it had been put on a fire. They say that, although it was high tide, when the earthquake came some canals dried up as though there had been a tremendous drought. The earthquake lasted as long as a Miserere, all felt the sheer horror of it, in view of the great danger to the people of Venice, who are not used to such earthquakes and have suffered none for many years. The bells in their towers rang by themselves in many places, especially at St Mark’s a terrifying thing to happen ...

[27 March] Then our Patriarch, Don Antonio Contarini, came [to the College], saying that the earthquake is a sign from God, and that misfortunes occur on account of sins. Venice is full of these, especially of sodomy, which is recklessly practised everywhere. The female whores have sent to him to say that they cannot make a living because no one now goes to them, so rampant is sodomy: even the old men are getting down to it ...
Breve, 16\textsuperscript{th} / 17\textsuperscript{th} C. Civica Raccolta Stampe A. Berterelli
Bellucci collection of amulets, Museo archeologico, Perugia
Towards the end of the seventeenth century, ‘certain devices were introduced to lessen the incidence of human misfortune’

- Insurance schemes: marine insurance, fire insurance and – ultimately – life insurance
- The ‘long-term implications’ of insurance were ‘immense’.
- Advances in fire-fighting: introduction of the hand-squirt, manual fire engines, bans on thatched rooves and wooden houses
- ‘Contemporaries thus gradually grew less vulnerable to certain kinds of disaster’.

• We now have many more rules to obey – health and safety guidelines, building regulations, duties of care for employers and public servants – and we also have insurance ... Anxiety of a certain kind [has] been neutralised or at least displaced ... We no longer magically inoculate buildings, not because we’re less superstitious, but because electric lighting, fire exits, extinguishers, the Fire Service, fire-retardant furnishings, clothes and building materials, as well as insurance polices, have come together to make us feel safer’.
Virgin Mary statue ‘started crying’ after Mexico earthquake that killed 343

Harley Tamplin for Metro.co.uk  Friday 29 Sep 2017 9:24 am

Imagen meses antes  Imagen Actual

People think the statue has been shedding tears (Picture: CEN)

The deadly earthquake that hit Mexico last week has caused a statue

Pictured after the tremors of October 2016, in which the church partially collapsed.