

Viella Historical Research



Disaster Narratives  
in Early Modern Naples  
Politics, Communication and Culture

*edited by*

*Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio,  
Lorenza Gianfrancesco, Pasquale Palmieri*

Translated by Enrica Maria Ferrara

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tel. 06 84 17 758  
fax 06 85 35 39 60  
[www.viella.it](http://www.viella.it)

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## II

### *Communities in Fear: Reporting Disasters in Chronicles and Petitions*





PIERLUIGI TEREZI

## Earthquakes, Society and Politics in L'Aquila in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries\*

### 1. Introduction

The earthquake that hit L'Aquila on 6 April 2009 was the latest in a series of seismic events that have occurred over the centuries. From its founding around the mid-thirteenth century at the northern edge of the Kingdom of Naples, the city has in fact been destroyed five times by earthquakes. In this contribution we will deal with three of them, which occurred, respectively, on 3 December 1315, on 9 September 1349, and from the end of November 1461 to March 1462.

These earthquakes had devastating effects on the population and on physical structures.<sup>1</sup> Damage, fatalities, and psychological and social repercussions have already been highlighted in broader studies, but these could not deal with the specific case in question or expound upon the issue of disasters in L'Aquila.<sup>2</sup> Despite the important role of earthquakes in the history of the city, there has in fact been a lack of historiographical focus specifically on this theme.<sup>3</sup> With this study, we want firstly to fill this gap but also provide answers to the questions raised in this volume and offer a perspective not centred on the Kingdom's capital, Naples.

\* Dedicated to Alessandro Angelucci († 2016).

1. Basic information in Emanuela Guidoboni and Alberto Comastri, *Catalogue of Earthquakes and Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Area from the 11th to the 15th Century*, Rome, INGV-SGA, 2005, Nos. 168, 194, pp. 325-332.

2. Besides the above-mentioned catalogue, see the contributions of Bruno Figliuolo, *Il terremoto del 1456*, 2 vols., Altavilla Silentina, Studi Storici meridionali, 1988-1989, vol. I, pp. 154-176; "La paura del terremoto tra Medioevo e Rinascimento", in *Storia e paure. Immaginario collettivo, riti e rappresentazioni della paura in età moderna*, ed. by Laura Guidi, Maria Rosaria Pelizzari and Lucia Valenzi, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1992, pp. 164-175; "Il fenomeno sismico nel bacino del Mediterraneo in età rinascimentale", *Studi storici*, 43 (2002), pp. 881-919; "I terremoti in Italia", in *Le calamità ambientali nel tardo Medio evo europeo: realtà, percezioni, reazioni*, ed. by Michael Matheus, Gabriella Piccinni, Giuliano Pinto and Gian Maria Varanini, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2010, pp. 319-335.

3. The first study on these earthquakes is dated and descriptive: Giovanni Vittori, "Stato dell'Aquila degli Abruzzi nei grandi periodi sismici del 1315, 1349, 1461-62", *Bullettino della Deputazione abruzzese di storia patria*, 8 (1896), pp. 228-236. A more recent account is provided by Maria Rita Berardi, "I terremoti nel periodo medievale", in *Breve storia dell'Aquila*, ed. by Fabio Redi, Pisa, Pacini, 2008, pp. 73-80.

The main issues addressed will be three: the ways in which the earthquake was interpreted by contemporaries; the reactions prompted by the seismic event; the material and social effects. These basic themes will be addressed in five sections, the first two of which will be devoted to secular and religious interpretations of the earthquake, and the following three to responses to the catastrophe, its socio-political consequences, the damage suffered and the reconstruction undertaken. In addition, these points will be ‘intersected’ by two constant thematic lines: the importance of politics, which is evident in all interpretations and accounts of the earthquakes, and the relationship between sources and disaster, particularly in the work of the chroniclers.

Before we proceed, an introduction to the latter is appropriate in order to establish a frame of reference. Buccio di Ranallo wrote a chronicle in verse, in the vernacular, of the history of L’Aquila from its founding to 1362. This constitutes the best source of information on the earthquakes in the fourteenth century and offers much food for thought in relation to the author’s vision due to its strong moralistic perspective.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the earthquake of 1461-1462, there are three chroniclers to be considered. The merchant Francesco d’Angeluccio wrote a memoir in the vernacular concerning the years 1436-1458, which is composed of brief narrative blocks offering essential information and few comments.<sup>5</sup> The Franciscan Observant Alessandro de Ritiis wrote a chronicle in Latin prose spanning the period from 1370 to 1495, in which he referred to the earlier chroniclers and added new sections and some comments.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Cola di Buccio devoted his chronicle to the early 1460s, specifically because they were marked by wars, earthquakes and other calamities. Unfortunately, his work has not survived, but its content was used by the eighteenth-century scholar Antonio Ludovico Antinori in order to provide an account of the earthquake of 1461-1462.<sup>7</sup> Without the original, this work will primarily serve as a source of information, not least because Cola provided far more details than the other chroniclers. The different approaches and motivations of the chronicles will be taken into consideration in this analysis, which will regard the authors as representative members of the society of which they were part.<sup>8</sup>

4. Buccio di Ranallo, *Cronica*, ed. by Carlo De Matteis, Florence, SISMEL, 2008 (from here on BdR). The account of the earthquakes is found at st. 240-247 (1315) and 806-819 (1349).

5. Francesco d’Angeluccio, *Cronaca delle cose dell’Aquila*, ed. by Antonio Ludovico Antinori, in Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevii*, Milan, 1742, vol. VI, cols. 883-926 (from here on FdA). For the earthquake, see cols. 899-903.

6. “La «Chronica civitatis Aquile» di Alessandro de Ritiis”, ed. by Leopoldo Cassese, part I, *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, 27 (1941), pp. 151-216 (from here on AdR). For the earthquake, see pp. 207-210.

7. Sections attributed to Cola di Buccio in Antonio Ludovico Antinori, *Annali degli Abruzzi*, Bologna, Forni, 1972, vol. XV, pp. 607-640 (from here on CdB).

8. For in-depth studies of the chronicles, see Chiara De Caprio, “La scrittura cronachistica nel Regno: scriventi, testi e stili narrativi”, in *Le cronache volgari. Atti della VI settimana di Studi Medievali (Roma, 13-15 maggio 2015)*, ed. by Giampaolo Francesconi and Massimo Miglio, Rome, Istituto Storico per il Medioevo, pp. 227-268; and the essay by the same author in this book.

## 2. *The political causes of the earthquake*

In the late Middle Ages, earthquakes were explained by means of religious or natural causes, which were not necessarily mutually incompatible.<sup>9</sup> When they were regarded as God's interventions, some types of social behaviour (usury, blasphemy, etc.) and minority groups (Jews, heretics, etc.) were indicated as their cause.<sup>10</sup> In the case of L'Aquila, the explanations placed politics at the centre, identifying the origin of divine retribution in the specific conduct of political leaders.

For Buccio di Ranallo, aggression towards the surrounding territory and internal political conflicts were the factors that spurred God's reaction. In 1315 L'Aquila was punished with the earthquake for the "granni peccati fatti li giorni giuti" ["serious sins committed in the past"];<sup>11</sup> by revisiting the chronicle retrospectively, we can identify these sins firstly with the capture of the castle of Machilone in 1299. On that occasion, breaking some pacts (not specified by Buccio), the citizens of L'Aquila destroyed the town centre and deported the women, impoverishing them. The municipal authorities had promised to accommodate them in a monastery, but this was instead given to the nuns of Machilone, who were "jentili donne" ["noblewomen"].<sup>12</sup> In one fell swoop, the government had taken three initiatives that Buccio regarded as execrable: betraying the trust of another community, attacking it by force of arms, and mistreating poor women and disregarding their needs to benefit wealthier women. These actions were contrary to the values that the chronicler expressed in his work, which was filled with references to good government, peace, institutional correctness and the moral conduct of the citizens. Buccio dismissed as un-Christian all political behaviour that was opposed to these values, stigmatising the choices made by rulers as sinful actions that had spurred God's reaction.

Buccio also attributed the earthquake of 1349 to the attacks against the surrounding countryside and its people. The earthquake occurred after the difficult period of the Black Death of 1348, which played a fundamental role in the chain of events because it determined the social scenario from which military aggression stemmed.<sup>13</sup> The population decline had in fact the effect of concentrating more wealth in the hands of the survivors, as Buccio himself observed.<sup>14</sup> According to

9. Some examples in Arno Borst, "Das Erdbeben von 1348: Ein historischer Beitrag zur Katastrophenforschung", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 233/3 (1981), pp. 529-569: 541-546. For the Renaissance, we must remember Giannozzo Manetti, *De Terremotu*, ed. by Daniela Pagliara, Florence, SISMEL, 2012.

10. Jussi Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival: Religious Responses to Natural Disasters in the Middle Ages*, Helsinki, Finnish Literature Society, 2002, pp. 102-105; Jacques Berlioz, *Catastrophes naturelles et calamités au Moyen Âge*, Florence, SISMEL, 1998, pp. 46-52.

11. BdR, st. 240.

12. *Ibid.*, st. 197-199.

13. *Ibid.*, st. 763-801. For a synthesis, Pierre Toubert, "La Peste Noire dans les Abruzzes (1348-1350)", *Le Moyen Âge*, 120/1 (2014), pp. 11-26.

14. BdR, st. 789-790. In this regard, see the essays by Rinaldo Comba and Paolo Pirillo in *La peste nera. Dati di una realtà ed elementi di una interpretazione. Atti del XXX Convegno storico internazionale (Todi, 10-13 ottobre 1993)*, Spoleto, CISAM, 1994.

the chronicler, this had negative repercussions on social behaviour, for luxury and meanness replaced the piety and decency that had characterised the period of the epidemic. Pomp was primarily evident in weddings, which became the strongest indicator of recovered vitality after the plague. Marriages degenerated into unions that had previously been unthinkable, however, such as those between old men and young girls, and men and women of the clergy who abandoned the cloth.<sup>15</sup> More generally, Buccio believed that enrichment determined a moral worsening of the citizens of L'Aquila: “la iente fo mancata, e l'avarizia cresciuta” [“people had died and avarice had grown”].<sup>16</sup>

This negative development of social dynamics culminated in a new-found aggressiveness directed outwards. Buccio pointed out that the attacks of 1349 were not wanted by the community or by the government but by Lalle Camponeschi, a nobleman who had been victorious in a clash between factions that had begun in the 1330s, and who had obtained the title of Count of Montorio.<sup>17</sup> From the beginning of the 1340s, Lalle had been the leader of the city and the decision-maker on its internal and external political affairs, thereby overshadowing the authority of the institutions. His power was such that, according to Buccio, those who manifested their opposition to the attacks against the surrounding territory risked death.<sup>18</sup> Buccio's insistence on the distinction between the community and Camponeschi, as well as other elements of the count's personal power,<sup>19</sup> suggest that the military action fell within Lalle's projects as the head of a single faction rather than as the leader of the whole community. The castles attacked were probably the refuges of his opponents, whom the count wanted to prevent from seizing power in the town. The population decline due to the plague had presumably affected the area that supported Lalle, against whom timid opposition was being manifested, as indicated by Buccio. All this increased the risk that those who had left would return to the city and cause the fall of the count.

According to Buccio, the political choices made by Lalle in his own interest and in the interest of his faction fell back on the whole community, which was already guilty of having resumed their immoral ways. The chronicler thus used the earthquake to reinforce the moralistic prescription of his chronicle, establishing a direct connection between political actions and divine reactions. Such a connection, in its factional-political connotation, was proposed once again in the fifteenth century by Bishop Amico Agnifili in the homilies delivered after the earthquake of November 1461. In that period King Ferrante, who had come

15. BdR, st. 794-796.

16. *Ibid.*, st. 800.

17. On Lalle, see Peter Partner, *Camponeschi, Lalle* [I], in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 17, Rome, Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1974, pp. 574-576; on the clashes of factions, see Pierluigi Terenzi, “Conflits urbains et politique monarchique en Italie méridionale. La ville de L'Aquila à la fin du Moyen Âge”, in *Factions, Lineages and Conflicts in European Cities in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by María Asenjo González and Andrea Zorzi, Florence, Firenze University Press (forthcoming), pp. 175-190.

18. BdR, st. 802-805.

19. On which see Berardo Pio, “Il tiranno velato fra teoria politica e realtà storica”, in *Tiranni e tirannide nel Trecento italiano*, ed. by Andrea Zorzi, Rome, Viella, 2013, pp. 95-118: 106-112.

to power in 1458, faced the rebellion of several subjects who believed him to be illegitimate and wanted the return of the Angevin dynasty.<sup>20</sup> In L'Aquila, Count Pietro Lalle Camponeschi – a descendant and political heir of Lalle – led the city to rebellion in January 1460, with the blessing of the bishop himself.<sup>21</sup> Almost two years later, however, the prelate had changed sides and addressed the citizens of L'Aquila in this way after the earthquake:

povirille non videte questo è lu juditio de Deo, che è venuti supra vuy perché state contra la Ecclesia; [...] quisto non n'è nigente, ancora aspetate de pezo da vinire, se non ve remendate di quisti vostri errori et che dagati piena obidientia allo santo patre.<sup>22</sup>

The bishop reprimanded the citizens of L'Aquila for siding against the Church, which at that time supported the Aragonese dynasty. With the city physically and psychologically on its knees, Agnifili sought to exploit the earthquake in order to influence local politics against the project of Pietro Lalle, who was leading the Angevin faction in the entire Abruzzo region. The political explanation of the earthquake thus took a new connotation marked by the immediacy and concreteness of its goals. In fact, the connection between human behaviour and earthquake was normally established *a posteriori* by those who relayed the events, often to promote better behaviour in society or in its leaders, as Buccio himself did. In contrast, Amico, who was directly involved and was not a judgemental commentator, used the earthquake as a tool for a political strategy to be pursued in the immediate future.

### 3. Divine intervention and the specificity of the earthquake

According to many authors, human behaviour provoked divine retribution in the form of various calamities.<sup>23</sup> The chroniclers of L'Aquila once again put forward different aspects of this interpretation, such as the apocalyptic meaning that Buccio evoked by using the term 'piaga' for the years 1315 and 1349.<sup>24</sup> In his and Alessandro de Ritiis's chronicles, however, we can gather some peculiarities regarding the punitive nature of the earthquake and the possibilities of a positive intervention on God's part.

20. Emilio Nunziante, *I primi anni di Ferdinando d'Aragona e l'invasione di G. d'Angiò (1458-1464)*, Naples, Giannini, 1898.

21. On Pietro Lalle see Terenzi, *L'Aquila nel Regno*, pp. 219-264.

22. "Poor you, you do not see that this is God's judgement, which has come upon you because you are against the Church; [...] this is nothing, expect even worse, if you do not correct these errors of yours and do not give full obedience to the holy father" (*Dispacci sforzeschi da Napoli*, vol. IV, *1° gennaio-26 dicembre 1641*, ed. by Francesco Storti, Salerno, Carlone, 1998, doc. 231, pp. 393-395).

23. Hanska, *Strategies*, pp. 116-143.

24. BdR, st. 240 e 807. For a comparison, see Christian Rohr, "Writing a Catastrophe. Describing and Constructing Disaster Perception in Narrative Sources from the Late Middle Ages", *Historical Social Research*, 32/3 (2007), pp. 88-102. See also Figliuolo, *Il fenomeno sismico*, p. 885.

When comparing the ways in which Buccio treated the plague and the earthquake of 1348-49, it emerges clearly that the chronicler regarded only the latter as God's retribution. He implicitly attributed a divine origin to the plague, too, through the use of biblical language ("general plague"), but at the same time he remarked that the plague came from the East, where it resulted in a larger number of fatalities.<sup>25</sup> Thus, if an act of God had been at its origin, this was not directed at L'Aquila, where the population had not behaved in such a way as to justify it. The city was not subject to the divine punitive act but to one of its consequences – the spreading of the disease – due to natural causes. Such a vision perhaps stemmed from knowledge of the ways in which contagion spread and the gradual effect of the plague on the population, which was not suddenly hit all at once. The earthquake was instead a violent, sudden, unpredictable and uncontrollable blow. Its shattering nature caused it to be more easily considered as a blow struck by God on the community in order to stir people's conscience. In Buccio, the quality of the catastrophe, so to speak, led to a more varied interpretation of divine actions, unlike the most widespread religious explanations of the time, which attributed any calamity to God.

Buccio also expressed this differentiated perception with regard to the divine intervention that mitigated the effects of the plague. During the epidemic, God made sure that the mortally ill would suffer only for a few days,<sup>26</sup> while he saved a substantial part of the population from contagion. The latter point was decisive, according to the chronicler, because the return to immoral behaviour in defiance of this divine grace led to the earthquake of 1349. The chronicler even imagined God's thoughts:

Io li agio perdonato e vengo puro fenenno,  
 canpaili dalla mortauta e pietate li avenno;  
 un'altra piaga männoli, che sse venga amonenno.<sup>27</sup>

In Buccio's vision, God intervened in two ways regarding the catastrophes: punitive, through the earthquake; protective, by containing the plague. The variation of judgement on the topic of divine intervention was not original per se, because it characterised different interpretations that originated within the ecclesiastical milieu. Nonetheless, this variation emphasized the positivity or negativity of the *effects* of the catastrophe, depending on whether or not the population adopted the right behaviour that God wanted to obtain through punishment.<sup>28</sup> Buccio instead focused more on the quality of the intervention itself than on its result, even though he emphasised that failure to acknowledge divine grace led to a new earthquake.

The same perspective was adopted by Alessandro de Ritiis, although his interpretation was more traditional. In fact, the friar-chronicler attributed both

25. BdR, st. 764.

26. *Ibid.*, st. 781.

27. "I have forgiven them and they offend me, / I saved them from mortality and they received pity; / I am sending them another plague, so that they are admonished" (*Ibid.*, st. 807).

28. Berlioz, *Catastrophes*, pp. 27-29.

the earthquake and the plague to the divine hand, even though he was not explicit with respect to the second. This can be inferred by examining two passages in which the chronicler mentions the earthquake that hit the Kingdom in 1456, using biblical terminology.<sup>29</sup> The first actually concerns the earthquake of 1456: "Aquila igitur non fuit tribulata terremotu predicto, quia tunc erat pestis in Aquila, unde deus benedictus noluit afflicto afflictionem addere".<sup>30</sup> The second passage, which was positioned after the account of the strong tremors that took place at the beginning of 1462, was instead an admonishment to the city: "Et sic quod evasit, Aquila, in anno 1456 tempore terremotus regni et pestis, nunc duplicatum est tibi flagellum, igitur cave et time deum ne deterius tibi contingat".<sup>31</sup>

Both the plague and the earthquake were afflictions or scourges wanted by God, who in 1456 nonetheless decided to spare L'Aquila from the earthquake because the city had already been hit by the epidemic. Ignoring this grace, the citizens of L'Aquila continued to behave badly and prompted the divine reaction. Like Buccio, De Ritiis associated the earthquake with failed acknowledgement of grace, but for the friar, divine action could be more independent and varied. God could in fact intervene to safeguard the population even in a calamity that He had caused, like the earthquake of 1461. In his account of the first tremors, De Ritiis noted that the earthquake "creditur fuisse a deo inspiratum, quia parum damnum fecit".<sup>32</sup> Conversely, regarding the stronger tremors of January 1462, he reported that some friars thought that it was a "Scourge of God".<sup>33</sup> The positive function and the negative one could manifest themselves within the same typology of catastrophe and also by God's will. Moreover, De Ritiis proposed a correspondence between the intensity of the earthquake and the quality of the intervention. The latter could be classed as negative in case of strong tremors, and positive in case of light ones. God's mitigating intervention was thus extended to earthquakes, which took on a plurality of meanings: besides being a punishment, they could also be a warning.

Finally, God could intervene positively, regarding the calamity that He had caused, by means of a miracle, also with the aim of encouraging better behaviour. As reported by the three fifteenth-century chroniclers, in the suburban church of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, the seat of the Celestine monks, the main chapel collapsed. Yet, consecrated hosts housed in a tabernacle below the chapel remained intact, protected by bricks that combined to form a little hut. This fact was regarded as a miracle and the rediscovered hosts were carried in procession.<sup>34</sup>

29. On this earthquake, see Figliuolo, *Il terremoto del 1456*.

30. "L'Aquila was not afflicted by that earthquake, because at that time there was the plague in L'Aquila, thus the blessed God did not want to add affliction to the afflicted" (AdR, p. 204).

31. "You saved yourself, L'Aquila, in the year 1456 at the time of the earthquake in the kingdom and the plague, now the scourge on you has doubled, thus be careful and fear God so that nothing worse happens to you" (*Ibid.*, p. 208).

32. "It was believed to have been inspired by God, for it caused little damage" (*Ibid.*, p. 207).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 207; FdA, col. 899; CdB, pp. 619-620.

The divine intervention was not ‘cost-free’, however, for the rediscovery of the hosts occurred only after a monk had demonstrated that he had kept his vow of fasting. This aspect, which is recalled by Cola di Buccio, refers to the relationship between human actions and divine reactions *after* the earthquake, which we are about to examine.

#### 4. *Social relations and political consequences*

Immediately after an earthquake, especially if it was one of great intensity, the population was overcome by panic, the wish to escape, and a sense of impotence. Since all this also applied to L’Aquila, we will not examine it in depth, referring instead to the available literature on this topic.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the next pages will deal with the social and religious reactions of the community and the political consequences of the earthquake.

The religious response was one of the most important reactions of a community after an earthquake and other disasters, and it came in various forms, such as individual and collective penances, and processions.<sup>36</sup> It brought the community back together around the need to avert the recurrence of the event or the worsening of its effects. Although what happened in L’Aquila in this matter did not differ from other cases, it is possible to highlight some peculiar characteristics.

Firstly, a strong connection between human behaviour and divine reaction was also established in relation to the aftermath of the earthquake. Buccio di Ranallo and Alessandro de Ritiis, as mentioned earlier, stigmatised the ungrateful and irreverent attitude of the citizens of L’Aquila towards God, with respect to some calamities that hit or spared the city. In 1315 the citizens of L’Aquila had not kept the promises they had made in order to prevent the tremors from continuing; in 1349 and in 1461 they did not acknowledge the grace received.<sup>37</sup> These attitudes contrasted with the need to take the right path indicated by God through earthquakes in order to avoid more occurrences such as this.<sup>38</sup> The miracle of the hosts in Collemaggio reinforced this strong connection, demonstrating that if a Christian had kept his promises – as the monk who fasted did – God’s intervention would be positive.

The same logic applied to penances and processions, which represented the typical way of invoking divine forgiveness. These practices also took place in L’Aquila, but unlike other cases, they were not directed at the patron saints but at God and, in the fifteenth century, at the Virgin.<sup>39</sup> However, what is striking is the particular intensity of these practices. In 1315 the citizens of L’Aquila did “penetenza la sera e la domane, frustannose ciascuno colli frustati in mane”.<sup>40</sup> In 1462 the

35. Berlioz, *Catastrophes*, pp. 20-26; Figliuolo, “La paura”.

36. Hanska, *Strategies*, pp. 48-100.

37. Respectively: BdR, st. 241 and 807; AdR, pp. 204 and 208.

38. Borst, “Das Erdbeben”, pp. 542-543.

39. On patron saints, see Hanska, *Strategies*, pp. 42-45; on the Marian cult, see Figliuolo, “La paura”, pp. 173-174.

40. “Penance day and night, all self-flagellating with whips in their hands” (BdR, st. 243).



preacher Timoteo da Verona ordered that at ten o'clock every evening everybody kneel down and recite the Hail Mary. In this case, the involvement of society was so extensive that the chroniclers regarded it as an extraordinary event determined by the authority of the preacher.<sup>41</sup> The population even went beyond the preacher's instructions, holding large processions for several days, which involved all sectors of society. At the sight of such devotion, those responsible for the guilds decided to close the shops and take part in the processions. In a cultural context dominated by trade and craft like L'Aquila, such a measure was extremely indicative of the religious fervour that permeated those days. Moreover, this movement reached such extraordinary proportions that, as Cola noted, as people joined the processions towards Collemaggio, less than a quarter of the citizenry remained in town.<sup>42</sup>

The earthquake had even more important effects in political terms, especially with respect to conflicts. Regarding 1315, Buccio observed how "tucte le gentigiano si divoti e contriti, liali l'uno a l'altro com' fussero romiti".<sup>43</sup> This image of the population contrasted with what the chronicler had described before the earthquake, when continual unrest permeated society. The seismic event thus had the positive effect of cementing the unity of the citizens of L'Aquila, an improvement that corresponded to the pacification of "nimistate granni" ["great enmity"]<sup>44</sup> in the aftermath of the earthquake itself. These were conflicts that, from the end of the thirteenth century, had set the urban districts against one another, determining a widespread unrest that generated strong internal instability. This pacification was so important that came to be mentioned in the city statutes, along with reference to the earthquake.

A set of norms was formulated before 1315, the year of its recognition on the part of King Robert of Anjou. Subsequently, two chapters on "pax tempore terremotus" ["peace at the time of the earthquake"]<sup>45</sup> were added. Since the manuscripts of the statutes date to the early fifteenth century, we can be sure that this referred to the earthquake of 1315 thanks to an explicit reference made in a letter of 1317.<sup>46</sup> In it, Robert wrote that, shaken by the terrible event, the citizens of L'Aquila had managed to set aside hatred and rancour, and had reached harmony. They had then begged him to validate the agreements because they provided for the granting of an amnesty for all the crimes perpetrated until the stipulation of the peace treaty itself. Royal validation was needed because a simple treaty drawn up by a notary was not enough to prevent penal justice, administered by a royal representative, from taking its course, and those guilty of murder and injury would be convicted.<sup>47</sup> Satisfied with the peace, the king

41. FdA, col. 902; AdR, p. 209; CdB, pp. 637-638.

42. CdB, p. 640.

43. "All the people went about pious and contrite, loyal to one another, as though they were hermits" (*Ibid.*, st. 245).

44. *Ibid.*, st. 244.

45. *Statuta civitatis Aquile*, ed. by Alessandro Clementi, Rome, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1977, chaps. 540-541.

46. Archivio di Stato de L'Aquila, *Archivio Civico Aquilano*, V 42, fol. 11<sup>r-v</sup>.

47. On these aspects see Terenzi, *L'Aquila nel Regno*, pp. 376-391.

conceded the dispensation, which concerned the population in its entirety and not just the small groups directly involved. For this reason, the charters adopted the royal provision, which extended peace between two adversaries to their respective relatives and ordered the captain, who was the royal officer stationed in the city, to ensure that all the agreements were respected “et maxime paces factas tempore terremotus” [“and especially peace treaties made at the time of the earthquake”]. The earthquake thus entered collective memory, not only due to its physical and psychological impact, but also because it put an end to long feuds and found legal recognition for its role as a ‘peacemaker’.

### 5. *The emergency and the damage*

After an earthquake, society obviously reorganised itself in practical terms too. In case of strong earthquakes, emergency measures concerned primarily housing and the clearing of the rubble. In L’Aquila each family found shelter in temporary accommodation “made of blankets and cloth” placed “especially in the main square”, in the cathedral square.<sup>48</sup> In any case, such accommodation was relatively long lasting: at least four weeks in 1315, nine in 1349, and four (not continuous) months in 1461-1462. In addition, in 1349 it was arranged for the rubble to be removed from the streets due to the efforts of the populations of the surrounding territory.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately we cannot know whether these interventions were ordered or coordinated by civic institutions or by the political leaders of the city.

We know, instead, that the authorities acted promptly to restore places and objects with a significant practical function for the community, such as the defence and organisation of social life, but which at the same time held a symbolic value. These measures and their promptness were due to particular motives, however.

In 1349, in order to replace the collapsed city walls, Lalle Camponeschi had fences built “de bon lename grosso multo bene chiovati”.<sup>50</sup> This measure was decided upon only after part of the population had begun to leave the city, believing “che mai deise Aquila ravetare”.<sup>51</sup> The image of the destroyed city was such that, because of the high number of collapsed or damaged buildings, “multi omini crediano no fosse più avetata”.<sup>52</sup> Discouragement was amplified by the collapse of the city walls, a symbol of the very existence of the community as an aggregation of people in a defined physical space. The reconstruction of the walls simultaneously served to provide the city with a means of defence, to recreate the urban environment and to keep the community together, offering a tangible symbol of the city’s identity in contrast to its abandonment by the population.

However, like in the military actions preceding the earthquake, there was a personal political implication. Buccio observed that “foroci gra’ desasci, ca

48. AdR, p. 207.

49. BdR, st. 813.

50. “Made of good strong timber, very well nailed together” (*Ibid.*, st. 819).

51. “That L’Aquila would never be repopulated again” (*Ibid.*, st. 817).

52. “Many men believed that it was no longer inhabited” (*Ibid.*, st. 816).

stevamo inzerrati",<sup>53</sup> creating a contrast with the positive acceptance of the reconstruction of the city walls managed by the count. Extending our view to the political situation of that time, we may say that the construction of temporary walls had also the aim of preserving Lalle's power. Depopulation would in fact weaken his power base, which would hardly be reconstituted in the new situation. Emigration would reinforce the network of small centres in the territory, making it impossible to reorganize the meshwork of consensus for his faction and favouring instead his adversaries, who, in the surrounding territory, found refuge and the possibility of exercising power. Once again, this would lead to a new phase of conflict and the risk for Lalle of losing his leadership and his life.

Nothing comparable to this occurred after the earthquake of 1461-1462, not least because the personal power of the faction leader Pietro Lalle Camponeschi was stronger and more focused on the needs of the community. In that situation, the measures taken for the restoration of places and objects of public interest had a collective connotation and probably involved the institutions as well. By way of introduction, however, it is necessary to say that the fifteenth-century chroniclers were more interested in physical damage than Buccio. What was most striking for Francesco, Alessandro and Cola was the effect of the earthquakes on public buildings, especially ecclesiastical ones. Cola offered detailed information on the individual damage suffered by, amongst other buildings in the town and the surrounding territory, over thirty churches, the bishop's palace and a couple of hospitals, which were affected to varying degrees.<sup>54</sup> These were key locations of public life which could not escape the attention of observers. The other two chroniclers indicated only the most important ones, however, providing a few more details on the cathedral and on the churches of Collemaggio and San Bernardino.<sup>55</sup> It was not by chance that these were the city's three major ecclesiastical focal points, animated, respectively, by the secular clergy, the Celestines, and the Franciscan Observants. Corresponding to these focal points were the four patron saints of L'Aquila: Maximus and George (cathedral), Celestine V and Bernardino of Siena.<sup>56</sup>

That said, it is necessary to note that the chroniclers paid equal attention to the bells, which were objects of great significance for the life of the community. They were an instrument of organisation of society because they marked the time for social life, religious and lay ceremonies, work, institutional activity, justice, etc. Bells had also a symbolic meaning, which reflected the identity of the city and – like the walls – the very existence of the community.<sup>57</sup>

53. "There was a great deal of inconvenience, because we remained locked inside" (*Ibid.*, st. 819).

54. CdB, pp. 610-618. For a list of the buildings affected, see Guidoboni and Comastri, *Catalogue*, p. 735.

55. FdA, col. 899; ADR, p. 207.

56. On these themes, see Raffaele Colapietra, *Spiritualità, coscienza civile e mentalità collettiva nella storia dell'Aquila*, L'Aquila, Deputazione abruzzese di storia patria, 1984.

57. Silvia Mantini, "Voci di Dio, voci degli uomini: campane e suoni tra ordinamenti e identità (secc. XIV-XVI)", in *Dal fuoco all'aria. Tecniche, significati e prassi nell'uso delle*

In L'Aquila this set of circumstances was reinforced by a particular attachment to these objects, which had also represented the political-military establishment of the city in the northern area of the Kingdom. In 1321, L'Aquila besieged Rieti and regained possession of its bell, which was called *Reatinella* and became the symbol of its superiority. Over the course of the fourteenth century, an actual system of bells was set up in the government building: the *Reatinella* marked the various moments of lay life, including the assemblies of the select councils; the big bell summoned the general parliament and called the population to arms; the bell of the clock tower marked the hours; the bell of justice or of sentence signalled the execution of a person condemned to death.<sup>58</sup>

Based on these premises, it is no wonder that the three chroniclers paid a great deal of attention to what happened to two of these bells on the occasion of the 1461 earthquake: the clock-tower bell fell and lodged itself into the ground without breaking, whereas the bell of justice broke. The practical and symbolic centrality of the former was confirmed by its prompt reactivation, which already occurred on 9 January 1462.<sup>59</sup> Remaking the latter required more time, not least because it had to be recast three times before it could be rung again in March 1464.<sup>60</sup> Both restorations carried a meaning that was beyond practical. Francesco d'Angeluccio associated the restoration of the clock-tower bell with the resumption of normal everyday life, which coincided with the return of the population to their homes. The bell of justice was instead returned to its function when the rebellion against Ferrante was over and the city was gearing itself towards peace. Both cases were strong signs of the reconstruction of the social and political body, and of public life, after the earthquake but also after the war.

The symbolic function of the bell of justice was even stronger, however. Cola di Buccio noted that "caustic observers resorted to moral causes by saying that the bell was not exercised too much by judges".<sup>61</sup> For some, the breaking of the bell was a sign of bad judicial administration marked by a virtual lack of activity. It is important to underscore that criticism did not emphasise a generic lack of justice but rather the specific inactivity on the part of those who should have exercised it. Reading between the lines, it is therefore possible to attribute to it a political meaning: although it is impossible to identify the "caustic observers", it is likely that they were opponents, or at least critics, of Count Camponeschi. In fact in those years, it would appear that Pietro Lalle exercised his power also by conditioning the judicial administration. In 1485, Ferrante used this motivation to justify the arrest of the count, who, according to the king, obstructed justice by preventing his *amici* from being punished and having the innocent condemned.<sup>62</sup>

*campane dal Medioevo all'età moderna*, ed. by Fabio Redi and Giovanna Petrella, Pisa, Pacini, 2007, pp. 371-389.

58. Maria Rita Berardi, *I monti d'oro. Identità urbana e conflitti territoriali nella storia dell'Aquila medievale*, Naples, Liguori, 2005, p. 162 n. 55.

59. AdR, p. 208; FdA, col. 901.

60. AdR, p. 208; FdA, col. 906.

61. CdB, p. 615. These are obviously Antinori's words, based on Cola's text.

62. On this event, see Terenzi, *L'Aquila nel Regno*, pp. 253-264.

Should this hypothesis be confirmed, the earthquake of 1461-1462 was once again exploited for political ends, albeit in a manner and with a strength that could not be compared with those of Bishop Agnifili.

### 6. *Aspects of the reconstruction*

The reconstruction was not often mentioned in the chronicles due to the slow and gradual progress of the operations. Only in case of exceptional measures did news of a reconstruction make its way into a chronicle, as happened with Antonio di Buccio, a follower of Buccio di Ranallo. He reported that in 1366, the bishop promised to have the interdict lifted for those who would offer “*dui jornate a Santu Massimo [...] per la Ecclesia refare*”, thereby achieving his goal.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the scarcity of information available, primarily from documentary sources, we can highlight some aspects of the reconstruction. First of all, in L'Aquila, too, the institutions – especially the ecclesiastical ones – took some time to initiate and complete the restorations.<sup>64</sup> While the cathedral was refurbished in fifteen years, the work at the church of Collemaggio had not as yet been completed by 1374. This is attested by the deed of sale for land sold by the monks in order to pay the master builders employed in the reconstruction of the church, “*diruta impetus magni terraemotus*”.<sup>65</sup> The difficulty in raising money slowed down the work and was a problem shared by many ecclesiastical bodies, which utilised several resources in order to cope with it. In some cases they took advantage of bequests, but more often they sold their lands and properties. The church of San Bernardino instead benefitted from substantial financing from the city and royal coffers, as well as from numerous donations, so that work could already resume in 1464. However, we must consider that at the time of the earthquake, the church was still being built.<sup>66</sup> This information opens a window onto the way in which the reconstruction of the ecclesiastical bodies was organised: each of them had to provide for itself by gathering funds and aid wherever and however it could. For this reason, in the mid-fourteenth century, faced with difficulties in the reconstruction of the cathedral, the Bishop turned to the Pope. In 1353, Innocent VI wrote to all the faithful that they would gain an indulgence if they gathered alms for the cathedral.<sup>67</sup>

Moving on to the secular world, at least for the fifteenth century we can glean the existence of a minimum of organisation, but no coordination on the part of the government. Instead, there was the activation of clientelistic connections amongst

63. “Two days to St Maximus [...] to rebuild the church” (Antonio di Buccio, *Delle cose dell'Aquila*, ed. by Antonio Ludovico Antinori, in Muratori, *Antiquitates*, coll. 711-824: col. 735, st. 198).

64. On the slowness of the reconstruction, see Borst, “Das Erdbeben”, pp. 549-552.

65. “Dilapidated due to the great force of the earthquake” (Guidoboni and Comastri, *Catalogue*, pp. 455-456).

66. Berardi, *I monti d'oro*, pp. 185-208.

67. Guidoboni and Comastri, *Catalogue*, p. 455.

the members of the élite and also the engagement of civic groups belonging to the so-called *locali*: the latter were the basic administrative units created at the time of the city's founding, roughly corresponding to the parishes of other towns. Before discussing these, we must note that all of the reconstructions began after 1463, in conjunction with L'Aquila's return to the submission to the Aragonese. After the war, human and economic resources could be directed towards the restoration of buildings, which was also conditioned by the political situation.

Already in May 1462, still in the period of rebellion, the government and Count Camponeschi sent an important signal to the castle of Sant'Eusanio in the surrounding countryside, which was amongst the buildings hit hardest by the earthquake. They granted the inhabitants of the castle permission to "edificare, fundare, componere et construere aliud castrum" in its countryside, but they did not go further.<sup>68</sup> Work began only in June 1464, when a wealthy member of the city's élite hired a master builder from Lombardy. This was probably one type of credit granted to the communities of the countryside, which was used by several citizens to strengthen their clientelistic relations and which constituted a building block of the relationship between the city and the surrounding territory.<sup>69</sup> We do not know how many localities were subject to this phenomenon, but the case of Sant'Eusanio proves that the earthquake offered some members of the élite, too, the opportunity to strengthen their power.

Regarding the reconstructions in the city, the *locali* served as operating units. For example, the men in Coppito restored a dormitory located in that district, while those in Civitatomassa had about 63m of the city walls reconstructed.<sup>70</sup> It does not seem that these measures were requested or coordinated by the municipal government but rather spontaneously carried out by *locali*. This underscores the fact that the original internal subdivision of the city continued to have an important role even two centuries after its founding, as already indicated by other corroborative evidence such as the sharing of the tax burden and of military service. Over the course of the fourteenth century, the four districts amongst which the *locali* were distributed emerged as the primary organisational units of the administration, primarily as a criterion for the subdivision of the magistracies. However, the *locali* endured as a basic identity-making element on which the other two levels, neighbourhood and city, were superimposed, forming an original composite identity.

## 7. Conclusions

Overall, the interpretations, reactions, and consequences of earthquakes in L'Aquila in the late Middle Ages were similar to those of other areas in Italy and Europe, but some peculiarities have emerged from the analysis. Firstly, the

68. "Establish, found, design and build another castle" (news and text in Colapietra, *Spiritualità*, pp. 191-192).

69. Terenzi, *L'Aquila nel Regno*, pp. 451-466.

70. Antinori, *Annali*, vol. XVI, p. 80.

attention paid by chroniclers to the phenomenon must be highlighted. For Buccio di Ranallo, it was the only disaster that constituted a divine punishment directed at the citizens of L'Aquila, but this peculiarity will have to be considered in depth through systematic comparisons with other chroniclers and an overall assessment of the *Cronica*. However, we can remark that the earthquake constituted an event of particular importance in the chronicle's framework because it offered an occasion to strengthen the moralistic message by emphasising a cause-effect connection between human behaviour and divine reactions. The same connection was also established to moralistic ends by Alessandro de Ritiis, albeit not as the piece of a puzzle in a narration deliberately conceived for that purpose. Instead, it was merely an aspect of the event narrated, which means that the friar was more akin to many lay chroniclers focused on the 'evenemential' account, like Francesco d'Angeluccio. In both, the earthquake was important as an event with a particular impact on the society but did not have social repercussions more significant than a war or a rebellion. It is not by chance that they were more interested in the physical damage than in the effects on society, while they underscored some phenomena that impressed them due to their exceptional character, such as practical difficulties and processions. Regarding Cola di Buccio, without the original text it is not necessary to concern ourselves with an assessment of his relationship with the narration of the disaster, which in any case was amongst the motives that led him to write.

The second point to be highlighted is that, for Buccio and Amico Agnifili, the cause of divine wrath was not the moral conduct of the population or of some minority categories but certain precise political choices by the leaders of the city. On this basis, both exploited the earthquake to precise political ends: in particular, the bishop did so in order to achieve an immediate change in the situation.

The third aspect is precisely the centrality of politics, in which personal power has more weight than the institutions. This centrality has been evident not only in the interpretations but also in the handling of the emergency and in the pacifications, especially in the case of Lalle Camponeschi. Through the collation of information on his power and evidence of his action after the earthquake, the personalistic and factional nature of the restoration of the city walls in 1349 becomes clear. The social and political reconfiguration due to the earthquake and the plague, which unfortunately is impossible to clearly understand but can only be inferred, was one of the main driving forces of the count's reaction as a faction leader. The fact that the political situation was conditioned by factions is also indicated by pacification, the outcome of which after 1315 was juridically important for the community through its inclusion in the statutes and through royal recognition.

Finally, regarding the municipal institutions, it is necessary to highlight their overall weak commitment when faced with the earthquake. Concerning the earthquake of 1315, Buccio ascribed to them a measure of blame but did not mention any intervention to manage the emergency or any attempt to initiate reconstruction and recover minimal living conditions. In 1349, the municipal institutions were 'replaced' by Count Lalle, who nonetheless acted on the motivations that we know. The absence of the institutions in Buccio's narration

must have corresponded to reality if we consider that, for other calamities, the chronicler duly mentioned the interventions of the government and the decisions of the councils, as he did in many other places in the chronicle. In the fifteenth century, although the recovery of the bells was probably decided and managed by the government, the chroniclers did not make it explicit, limiting themselves to presenting the *fait accompli*. If the intervention of the institutions was weak, other approaches were adopted to deal with the earthquake: self-management, the initiative of the *locali*, the clientelism of the élite and not least the personal power of the Camponeschis were all elements that determined the 'recovery' of the citizens of L'Aquila after the seismic events.