



DisComPoSE - Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe

Report of the DisComPoSE seminar *Environmental disasters in modern age: research experiences about the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America*

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On November 12th 2019, in the framework of the ERC-funded project Discompose, took place the seminar *Le calamità ambientali in età moderna: esperienze e prospettive di ricerca su Penisola iberica e America latina (Environmental disasters in the modern age: experiences and research perspectives on the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America)*, with the participation of Armando Alberola Romá (University of Alicante), María Eugenia Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda (University of Sevilla) and Adrián García Torres (University of Clermont Auvergne) developing questions related to the methodology and analysis of the sources about the study of disasters.

Prof. Armando Alberola Romà introduces his report analyzing some of the biggest catastrophes that occurred during the modern age in the Iberian Peninsula, in particular in the territories of Valencia and Catalonia: earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and above all hydrometeorological disasters, such as drought and inundation. The speaker then focuses attention on the different types of sources useful for the study of the catastrophes of the modern age: chronicles, travel books, memorials, printed documents, correspondences are the sources that contain the most information about the disaster and that, produced usually immediately after the catastrophe, circulated at local and European level. In addition,



however, there are also other types of documentation: religious sources (for example sermons), scientific sources (technical reports by experts and engineers) and administrative produced at municipal and central level (with particular reference to the “Secretaria de Estado” and the “Consejo de Castilla”, organisms more involved during the management of the emergency in the territories of the Iberian Peninsula).



Prof. Eugenia Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda

introduces his relationship with an excursus related to the history of the studies of disasters. The speaker points out that these have become the subject of historiographical investigation only from some decades, starting from the pioneering work of Bernard Vincente on earthquakes in Almería¹ and especially since the 90s thanks to the

development of studies on the history of mentalities that have focused attention on the relationships between environmental processes and societies. Then goes on to underline the importance of adequate knowledge of toponymy, especially in relation to volcanoes (that name in the course of history was often subject to change) for the correct use of catalogs and geographical dictionaries as a research tool. Equally important is the study of cartography not only for the geolocation of the event, but also because it visually represents the spatial characteristics of the time.

Prof. Adrián García-Torres focuses his report on the analysis of some volcanic eruptions that occurred in the territories of Spanish America during the Bourbon age, underling the importance of the intervention of local institutions during emergency management: in fact the viceroy, the magistrate of the *Audiencia*, the *corregidores* and the *cabildos* are the actors most directly involved after the impact of the disaster.

¹ B. Vincente, *Les tremblements de terre dans la province d'Almeria (XVe-XIXe siècle)*, «Annales, Economies, sociétés, civilisations», 29 année, n. 3, 1974. pp. 571-586.