



“Treatises on Earthquakes” in late Renaissance (16th-17th cent), at the roots of historical seismology

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It was soon after the damaging November 1570 earthquake at Ferrara, Northern Italy, that the academic Stefano Breventano from Pavia, a small town in Northern Italy as well, started to compose his “Treatise on the earthquake”. Completed by September 1576, this 250-page manuscript was to remain unpublished for centuries. The critical edition recently appeared (Albini, 2007) was a due tribute to the remarkable amount of information put together by Breventano, an otherwise “obscure” literate who, before getting involved with earthquakes, had published a history of the antiquities and remarkable events at his hometown Pavia (1570). Indeed, he was not the first Renaissance author to pursue the goal of checking into the historical sources of the previous centuries in search of earthquakes and other natural phenomena. What is outstanding in his “Treatise” is that he succeeded in retrieving information on more than two hundred earthquakes, along two thousand years, between 504 B.C. and 1575 A.D., covering the whole Euro-Mediterranean region, and the West Indies in early 16th century. Breventano’s essay is here presented, together with a comparison between his style and amount of information with those included in the work by the contemporary British author Stephen Batman, “The Doome warning all men to the Judgement” (1581). A later treatise is presented also, the work by Marcello Bonito (1690) “Terra Tremante [Trembling Earth]”, which could easily be defined as a worldwide list of earthquakes. In structure and content, Bonito’s work goes along the same lines of Breventano, and could be considered a precursor of today descriptive catalogues, because of his outstandingly modern approach that paved the way to modern historical seismology.