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"Man and Natural Disaster in the Late Middle Ages: The Earthquake in Carinthia and Northern Italy on 25 January 1348 and its Perception"

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Rohr, Christian. "Man and Natural Disaster in the Late Middle Ages: The Earthquake in Carinthia and Northern Italy on 25 January 1348 and its Perception." *Environment and History* 9, no. 2, "Natural Disasters and their Perception" special issue (May, 2003): 127–49. doi:[10.3197/096734003129342791](https://doi.org/10.3197/096734003129342791). How did people react to natural abnormalities such as earthquakes and floods in the Middle Ages? Why did they experience them as disasters? How did they explain them? Did they really see them as a divine punishment? Reports of the earthquake of 1348, which was followed by a landslide and a flood destroying the city of Villach, were often combined with accounts of the Black Death, which arose in these regions just a few weeks later. There are still only a few studies of natural disasters in the Middle Ages, and for the eastern Alpine regions only the earthquake of 25 January 1348 has been examined in detail, albeit using a variety of approaches. This study tries to provide a mentality-bound approach, searching for the mentalities of the people, but without claiming to write a 'history of mentalities'. Nevertheless, it seems easier to examine mentalities in extreme situations than in normal times, though the records concerning natural disasters in the Late Middle Ages are mostly brief. By re-visiting the sources for the 1348 earthquake following the studies of Borst (1981) and Hammerl (1992) and looking at aspects of its perception, management and explanation, this article calls into question the supposed 'medieval' equation of natural disaster and divine punishment. In spite of the fact that the natural disasters and Black Death were mixed up in the sources, there is little evidence that the earthquake itself was experienced as anything other than something tremendous and unexpected, but which also belonged to daily life. All rights reserved. © 2003 The White Horse Press

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