

# DEALING *with* DISASTERS

programme and abstracts



Radboud Universiteit





Conference Programme

17 – 18 June 2021

Dealing with Disasters: Cultural Representations of Catastrophes,  
c. 1500-1900

Nijmegen



**Radboud University**



## Colophon

Editors	Marieke van Egeraat Adriaan Duiveman
Design booklet	Adriaan Duiveman
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[www.dealingwithdisasters.nl](http://www.dealingwithdisasters.nl)

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## Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I welcome all participants to the international conference 'Dealing with Disasters: Cultural Representations of Catastrophes, ca. 1500-1900'. When we started planning the conference in January of last year, we could never have imagined that we would soon be experiencing a catastrophe ourselves. From January 2020, however, a pandemic spread across the world and radically changed our daily lives. This new reality brought sorrow and pain, but also forged new bonds of solidarity across communities and generations.

This conference brings together scholars from various backgrounds to adopt multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to reconceptualise the socio-cultural consequences of disasters. Without denying the very real and immediate impact that calamities have on people's lives, we consider disasters to be both cultural phenomena and natural events. The power of cultural discourses to shape the perception of disasters is therefore key to understanding their wider societal impact. Such representations are not only profoundly influenced by specific cultural habits and beliefs, but also by the media that communicate these events, as we have witnessed during the current crisis.

The Covid-19 crisis also changed our original plans for this conference. We had to postpone it, and now, in the summer of 2021, we are finally ready to welcome you in the lovely surroundings of the monastery Soeterbeeck, which is used as a conference center by Radboud University. Some of you will participate digitally, others will join us on location. In both cases we hope that you will enjoy this conference, and that we will learn from each other's areas of research.

Kind regards, also on behalf of the research team 'Dealing with Disasters',

Prof. dr. Lotte Jensen

## Programme Thursday 17 June 2021

What	Where	Time (UTC + 2)	Your time-zone
Welcome by Lotte Jensen	Tuinzaal/Online	09.30 – 09.45	
Keynote 1	Tuinzaal/Online	09.45 – 11.00	
<b>Susan Broomhall, 'Early modern disaster by nature'</b>			
Break		11.00-11.30	
Panel session 1	Tuinzaal/Online	11.30 – 13.00	
<b>News from far away</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Joop Koopmans, 'Dutch newspapers about earthquakes in Italy and beyond before Lisbon 1755'</li> <li>· Ansgar Schanbacher, 'Earthquakes in media and urban discourses of the 18th Century'</li> <li>· Lindsay Janssen, "'Famine Countries": Robert Ellis Thompson and the New York Irish World on Ireland and India'</li> </ul>			
Panel session 2	Windesheimzaal/ Online	11.30-13.00	
<b>Popular perceptions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Florian Wieser, 'The Ten Plagues of the New World. Perceptions and politics of Native American population collapse in 16th-Century New Spain (Mexico)'</li> <li>· Nina C. Rastinger and Claudia Resch, 'Between acceptance and activity: Coming to terms with catastrophes in the early modern press'</li> <li>· Theo Dekker, 'Epidemics in the early modern period. The changing representations of epidemics by ordinary people in Dutch chronicles'</li> </ul>			
Lunch break	De Refter	13.00-14.00	

Panel session 3	Tuinzaal/online	14.00-15.30	
<b>Technologies of imagination</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Eva Bodovics, 'How to narrate a disaster? Representation techniques of floods in late 19th century Hungary'</li> <li>· Julia Mariko Jacoby, 'Disaster narratives in Japanese disaster publications between tradition and modernity, 1662-1923'</li> <li>· Marie-Hélène Huet, 'Fire and ashes: the red skies of Krakatau'</li> </ul>			
Panel session 4	Windesheimzaal/Online	14.00 – 15.30	
<b>Memories that matter</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Tanja Kilzer, 'Symbols of hope and overcoming a health disaster'</li> <li>· Julian Zimmermann, 'Catastrophes written in stone: Inscriptions as permanent disaster commemoration between pre-modern and modern times'</li> <li>· Adriaan Duiveman, 'Breaking the cycles of catastrophe: Disaster, time, and nation in Dutch flood commemoration books, 1757-1800'</li> </ul>			
Break		15.30-16.00	
Keynote 2	Tuinzaal/online	16.00-17.15	
<b>Rebecca Totaro, 'Accounting for "great" plagues, earthquakes, and floods'</b>			
Break		17.15-18.00	
Conference dinner		18.00	

## Programme Friday 18 June 2021

What	Where	Time (UTC + 2)	Your timezone
Keynote 3	Tuinzaal/Online	09.45 – 11.00	
<b>Christian Rohr, ‘Disaster memory and “banished memory”. General considerations and case studies from Europe and the United States (19th-21st centuries)’</b>			
Break		11.00 – 11.30	
Panel session 5	Tuinzaal/Online	11.30 – 13.00	
<b>Moving readers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Andrew G. Newby, “Eating off their own Ffngers”: Disaster charity campaigns in the absence of images’</li> <li>· Fons Meijer, ‘Suffering compatriots: Affect, nationalism and the construction of compassion in times of catastrophe in the 19th-century Netherlands’</li> <li>· Tess Somervell, ‘A safe operating space: Sermons on the Great Storm of 1703’</li> </ul>			
Panel session 6	Windesheimzaal/ Online	11.30 – 13.00	
<b>Landscape and region</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Daniel Moerman, “Um diese zeit war es ser trocken’: Chronicling droughts and their consequences in the Netherlands, 1550-1850’</li> <li>· Sophie van Os, ‘Drawing distress: Disaster and regional character in the nineteenth-century periodical press’</li> <li>· Hanneke van Asperen, ‘The landscape as wounded body in visual images of disasters, 17th-18th century’</li> </ul>			
Lunch break	De Refter	13.00 – 14.00	
Exhibiting Catastrophes	Tuinzaal/Online	14.00 – 15.00	

Break		15.00 – 15.30	
Panel session 7	Tuinzaal/Online	15.30 – 17.00	
<b>Blame and conflict</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Anneloek Scholten, 'The Dutch rinderpest in local colour fiction. Religion, legend, and the rhetoric of blame'</li> <li>· Lilian Nijhuis, 'The role of hubris in poems on the Delft Thunderclap' (1654)</li> <li>· Adam Sundberg, 'Building the social cascade: Connecting culture, disaster, and persecution in the 1730s'</li> </ul>			
Panel session 8	Windesheimzaal/ Online	15.30 – 17.00	
<b>Foreseeing the Apocalypse</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Laszlo Kontler, 'Earthquakes, the end of the world, and perspectives on the Last Judgment 1686-1756'</li> <li>· Marieke van Egeraat, 'Selling apocalyptic interpretations of disasters in the sixteenth-century Low Countries'</li> <li>· Jennifer Egloff, 'Earthquakes and End Times: Apocalyptical Interpretations of Global Disasters in the Early Modern Atlantic World'</li> </ul>			
Closing words by Lotte Jensen	Tuinzaal/Online	17.00 – 17.15	
Drinks		17.15-18.30	



## Keynote 1

Susan Broomhall

### Early Modern Disaster by Nature

Early moderns held varied views about dramatic and destructive events, some of which they understood to have supernatural causes and others natural. This paper focusses upon those events that were perceived to be enacted by natural forces and seeks to analyse exactly what 'natural' and 'disaster' might mean when brought together in conceptual collaboration. It proposes that diverse interpretations of what a natural disaster, or destructive events caused by nature, could mean for early moderns, depended upon, among other aspects, perceptions of temporality and human emotions.

The paper explores a range of different genres in which events caused by nature were considered, including fables, poetry, essays and journal accounts from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although they produce very different forms of knowledge, collectively, they suggest that disaster might only be one mode, point or perhaps juncture, temporal and emotional, on the interpretive spectrum of such destructive events.

*Susan Broomhall leads the Gender and Women's History Research Centre at the Australian Catholic University. She is the author of monographs and edited collections focussing on women and gender; emotions; science, technologies, and knowledge practices; agricultural and environmental practices; material culture; cultural contact and global encounters; heritage of the early modern world. Her current research includes understanding turbulent social and physical systems in historical activity, especially in health and environmental events; women's activities and the role of gender ideologies in early modern natural research management regarding forests and waterways in particular; and women's participation in agricultural innovations since the early modern period.*

## Panel session 1 – News from far away

Joop Koopmans

### **Dutch newspapers about earthquakes in Italy and beyond before Lisbon 1755**

In 1693, the 10 March issue of the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* (Sincere Haarlem Newspaper) opened with a report from Sicily (with Palermo, 22 January in its dateline) that an earthquake had destroyed one third of the isle. It had immensely struck the coastline, even in such a way that elderly people would not recognize Sicily anymore. A cursory research in the digital collection of Dutch newspapers ([delpher.nl](http://delpher.nl)) demonstrates that this short notice is one of many early modern news reports in these papers about earthquakes. This means that its Dutch readers were occasionally confronted with this phenomenon, although earthquakes were rare and not devastating in their own country. Nevertheless, the very idea of a sudden shaking of the ground causing the destruction of complete regions must have been terrifying also for them. Furthermore, Dutch citizens, in particular travellers, merchants and diplomats, could be victims of earthquakes when they were abroad, visiting or living in areas where these disasters happened.

Portugal's 1755 earthquake, which completely ruined its capital Lisbon, is the best-known example of earthquakes in early modern Europe, and therefore also the best internationally researched case. I already analysed how Dutch newspapers reported about this catastrophe. It has not yet been scrutinized, however, how these papers treated earlier earthquakes: how often they included such reports; how detailed their content was; which parts of the world they addressed; how they explained the disasters, etc. In short: which perception and discourse can we grasp from the early Dutch newspapers concerning earthquakes. This paper will deal with these cultural issues, covering the period from the first digitized report about an earthquake in Austria in 1623 until the earthquakes of the early 1750s.

*Dr. Joop W. Koopmans is Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Groningen. His field of research is the interaction between media and politics in early modern Europe. In 2018, he published the volume *Early Modern Media and the News in Europe: Perspectives from the Dutch Angle* (Leiden/Boston; Brill). Two chapters in this volume deal with disas-*

*ters and Dutch news media: the 1730s shipworm disaster and the 1775 Lisbon earthquake.*

Ansgar Schanbacher

## **Earthquakes in media and urban discourses of the 18th century**

In many world regions earthquakes represent a potentially dangerous but only partly predictable hazard to humans, settlements and infrastructures. However, the origin of earthquakes as well as their consequences today can be explained convincingly by science.

In the early modern period though, knowledge about earthquakes and their consequences was limited. Explanations included proto-scientific approaches and theological reasoning, while for people of the second half of the 18th century, the great Lisbon earthquake in 1755 was a crucial experience which destabilized the theological world view of ordinary and educated people.

The first part of my paper will discuss the great variety and developments of knowledge concerning earthquakes – be it in tracts or journals such as the *Bremisches Magazin zur Ausbreitung der Wissenschaften, Künste und Tugenden*. Experts like Georg Agricola, René Descartes or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz often linked volcanic activities with fires and earthquakes; in contrast, the 18th-century encyclopedia of Johann Heinrich Zedler (vol. 8, 1734) emphasizes the influence of storms and subterranean water on the emergence of earthquakes.

A second level of discussion which will be linked to the first part includes perceptions and reactions on earthquakes in early modern German and Dutch cities. Here, local periodicals – strongly influenced by ideas of the Enlightenment and hence the expert discourses –, sermons, images and archival sources are analysed and discussed.

In sum, the parallel existence and competition of religious, scientific and every-day explanations of menacing but mostly distant natural phenomena in the 18th century in the media and the urban sphere will be exemplified on earthquakes.

*Ansgar Schanbacher received a Ph.D. at Göttingen University. In his dissertation he analysed the consequences of the potato blight in Northwest Germany (1845-1848). Currently, he is a researcher at the Göttingen Insti-*

*tute for Regional Historical Research. His ongoing research concerns the management of natural resources and the dealing with natural hazards in Early Modern cities in Central Europe and the Netherlands (Braunschweig, Würzburg, Utrecht).*

Lindsay Janssen

## **“Famine Countries”: Robert Ellis Thompson and the New York Irish World on Ireland and India**

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Irish and Irish North-American periodicals repeatedly drew links between famines in India and Ireland. Irish-American economist and early sociologist Robert Ellis Thompson was a regular contributor to the *Irish World* during the late 1890s and his writings align with the newspaper's concerns for the downtrodden around the globe. In his criticism, Thompson made transcultural use of representations of the mid nineteenth-century Great Irish Famine by using his own childhood memories to represent the dire situation in his contemporary India. Moreover, he placed these Famine memories in service of a global economic and anti-imperialist argument in favour of self-rule, protective trade tariffs and the stimulation and diversification of home industries. This call to develop and support home industries as a means to make Ireland's economy less dependent and less fragile was also found in other periodicals, such as the *Dublin United Irishman* and the *New York Irish-American*. Thompson considered his anti-imperialist economic approach the only way that India, Ireland, or any country in a similar situation could stop being a “famine country”, vulnerable to natural disasters such as blight or drought.

While some commentators, most notably the famous nationalist John Mitchel, upheld a competitive view of Irish suffering and placed the Irish at the top of a global hierarchy of suffering, Thompson's more egalitarian, what Michael Rothberg would call “multidirectional,” (2009) approach resists hierarchy formation. In this manner, memory of the Irish Famine functions in an ethical fashion, as its connotations of (past) adversity and oppression in Ireland, serve to point out the injustices done under the cover of imperialism and free market economics in other times and places.

*Lindsay Janssen works at Radboud University Nijmegen (RU) as a lecturer*

*and postdoctoral researcher. She is part of the NWO-funded research project 'Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation' and specifically investigates educational practices regarding the Great Irish Famine. She obtained her Ph.D. from RU and between 2017 and 2019 was affiliated to University College Dublin for her research on Irish and Irish North-American periodical culture between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For this project, she was awarded an individual two-year postdoctoral fellowship by the Irish Research Council.*

## **Panel session 2 – Popular perceptions**

Florian Wieser

### **The Ten Plagues of the New World: Perceptions and politics of Native American population collapse in 16th-century New Spain (Mexico)**

Shortly after their conquest by the Spanish, the native peoples of the Americas were struck by a second disaster: a series of catastrophic epidemics. Today it is known that these were caused by new pathogens introduced by the conquerors, but among contemporaries, this uniquely devastating wave of illnesses invited a broad variety of explanations. Focussing on the well-documented situation in the colony of New Spain (Mexico), this paper investigates the many ways in which the epidemics were interpreted in both Spanish Colonial and Indigenous Mexican sources and the causes and meanings they were assigned.

The sources drawn on are mainly chronicles and town minutes, but also clerical writings framing the death of the natives within a broader eschatology and medicinal treatises grasping for an explanation within the Galenic-Hippocratic world view, as well as the illustrations accompanying all of these texts. Across the varied political and intellectual factions of colonial society, perceptions of the epidemics are thus shown to range from tragedy to blessing and from deserved punishment to a loss of paradisaical innocence.

In this respect, the paper seeks to particularly problematise the distinction between man-made and natural disaster, doing so in two ways: First, by questioning how in the Early Modern mindset, focussed on the relationship

between mankind and God as it was, a disaster could be anything but man-made; and second, by showing how this distinction is further blurred in the case of epidemic illnesses due to the effects of political measures, public awareness, and social attitudes upon the development and fatality of an epidemic. In this, the paper acknowledges the parallels between its subject matter and current events, and hopes to contribute through its analysis of historical examples to a more general view of the way societies make sense of epidemic illness.

*Florian Wieser is currently a research assistant in the project “Das Schneidhaus der Fugger in Augsburg” organised by the Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum Ingolstadt and Ludwig-Maximilians-University (LMU) in Munich. He has received his BA and MA in History at LMU and has been a recipient of the Deutschlandstipendium. His experience abroad includes an exchange semester at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, an internship at the German Historical Institute in London, and research stays in Madrid and Seville. He has previously published on the role of the sexed body in the history of racism and on colonial discourses about Indigenous Mexican homosexualities.*

Nina C. Rastinger and Claudia Resch

## **Between acceptance and activity: Coming to terms with catastrophes in the early modern press**

This paper deals with medial representations of natural disasters in the 18th century Austrian newspaper *Wien[n]erisches Diarium* (today: *Wiener Zeitung*). By analyzing concrete patterns of text, it aims to reveal both historical human-nature-relations and the cultural frames around them. On a theoretical level, this approach is based on the perspective of ecocriticism and environmental communication studies (cf. Slovic, Rangarajan & Sarveswaran 2019). For instance, modern concepts of (non-)human agencies (e.g. Dürbeck, Schaumann & Sullivan 2015: 121) will be employed to analyze which beings, phenomena or matters are depicted as active forces in the context of disasters and which are framed as powerless or incapable to act.

Empirically verified insights into these dynamics will be provided by a corpus-based investigation of the historical *Wiener Zeitung* which exists since 1703 and is now available in digitally searchable full text, cf. DIGITARIUM

(<https://digitarium.acdh.oeaw.ac.at>, Resch 2019) and ANNO (<http://anno.onb.ac.at/>, Kann & Hintersonleitner 2015). Hence, coming from the field of Digital Humanities, an efficient “distant reading”-approach can be taken as natural disasters occupy much textual room in the investigated newspaper but are widely dispersed within it.

Extracts of the textual material show that, despite the 18th century being the century of Enlightenment, religious and ritual responses to natural calamities still played an important role in coming to terms with catastrophes. Events like storms, floods or earthquakes were frequently framed as acts of god and coupled with doomsday metaphors which in turn affected human agency: Since natural disasters were associated with supernatural forces, they were located outside the realm of human action. Thus, the mourning character of disaster reports as well as news about failed human attempts to end disasters by their own efforts ultimately reminded people to improve their relationship with God to create the conditions for salvation again.

*Nina C. Rastinger is a researcher at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Her current areas of interest include historical newspapers, language change and digital methods for corpus-based research. At present, she is part of the go!digital-project Das Wien[n]erische Diarium: A digital data treasury for the humanities as well as of the FWF-project Relational Adjectives in the History of German. She has received degrees in both German Philology and Psychology and is currently completing her Master's degree in German Philology and General Linguistics at the University of Vienna.*

*Claudia Resch is a senior researcher at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Current research focuses on German literature of the Early Modern period and the application of literary and linguistic computing in a corpus-based approach to textual issues. At present, she helms the digital transformation of the Wien[n]erisches Diarium newspaper as project leader. From 2012 to 2017 she was a lecturer at the Department for German Philology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, since 2017 she teaches at the Department of History at the University of Vienna.*

Theo Dekker

## **Epidemics in the early modern period: The changing representations of epidemics by ordinary people in Dutch chronicles**

The methods of preventing and controlling plagues depended heavily on contemporary understandings of its causes and course. However, this 'contemporary understanding' refers in general to the printed ideas expressed by; authorities, scholars and medical practitioners, and often excludes how 'ordinary' people framed epidemics. Chronicles – handwritten and chronological records of events – offer a new perspective on how the middle class of Dutch society responded to epidemics and provides an insight on how they thought and acted upon plagues and disasters.

Based on my current research of 115 chronicles written between 1500 and 1850, it seems that ordinary people, as well as those in positions of authority, secular, intellectual, and religious, continued to believe the idea that plagues could have natural and supernatural origins. Both faith and reason conditioned responses to plague and the solutions chosen did not prove antagonistic to another. The two systems of belief worked together, usually harmoniously. However, even if most people accepted the ultimate divine origin of plague, it did not prevent people from seeking assistance from mortal healers nor governments from enacting public health ordinances. Moreover, they also acknowledged the role of other factors, including odd weather patterns (scorching summers or frigid winters), famines, troop movements, wars, 'fetid miasmas,' stagnant pools of water, prodigies, monstrous births, and other premonitions.

Analysing the relationships that chroniclers made between epidemic plagues and other factors, and how they changed diachronically - under the influence of 'new' knowledge - is the core of my research. As a result, the framing of epidemic diseases tended to be holistic and inclusive, although the explanation and the combination of causes changed diachronically. Therefore, studying epidemics by analysing chronicles not only enables historians to investigate the response of the populace on epidemics, but provides an insight in their worldview as well.

*Theo Dekker, PhD-candidate at Leiden University, in the project: *Chronicle Novelty. New Knowledge in the Netherlands, 1500-1850*, supervised by:*

*Judith Pollmann (UL) and Erika Kuijpers (VU), studies how the appropriation of new knowledge influenced ideas on causality and the appreciation of the new, for which he uses more than 300 chronicles. They are analysed by computational methods, which makes it possible to compare the chronicles diachronically. With a background in history and philosophy of science, he focusses especially on epidemics, meteorology and how they are related to other events by early modern Dutch chroniclers.*



## Panel session 3 – Technologies of imagination

Eva Bodovics

### **How to narrate a disaster? Representation techniques of floods in late 19th century Hungary**

Researches focusing on the media coverage of disasters in recent years have shown that the way of narration and the topos that appear in narratives are cultural tools that inform much more about what we think of a natural disaster than what it is like in reality.

In my paper, I will compare the representation of two floods happened in Hungary to examine whether the roots of these narratives and topos can be found. The two floods are the two most serious natural disasters in the history of Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which occurred in Miskolc (1878) and Szeged (1879). While the flood of Miskolc was the deadliest with 277 fatalities, the flood of Szeged was the most severe in terms of material loss since almost the whole town was ruined by the flood. What makes the comparison exciting is the fact that we are talking about two completely different floods. While the flood of Miskolc was a so-called flash flood running from the mountains destroying the town within some hours, the flood of Szeged was a slowly unfolding and long-lasting one occurring almost in every early spring. Thus, despite the fact that the two events took place in quite different ways, and there are only a few identical elements in their consequences, we can still observe many similarities in their representations which can be paralleled with the narratives of today's disasters.

Besides the written narratives intended for the public (press articles, poems, memoirs), I would like to place great emphasis on the visual representations of the floods: on graphics, paintings and photographs. The latter are particularly interesting, as these two floods were firstly recorded also by the new technique of the 19th century, the photography which led to the emergence of a completely new visual narrative language of floods.

*Eva Bodovics (1985) is a historian specialised in social and urban history. She is a PhD candidate at the Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest); her thesis is about the social and economic aspects of the 1878 Miskolc flood. Her research interest is the social history of the Austrian-Hungarian era (1867-1918), particularly the nature-society interactions both in towns and*

*the countryside. She is working as an archivist in the Hungarian National Archives Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives and as a researcher in the 'Knowledge, Landscape, Nation and Empire: Practices of knowing and transforming landscape in Hungary and the Balkans, 1850-1945' research group based in the Research Centre for Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.*

Julia Mariko Jacoby

## **Disaster narratives in Japanese disaster publications between tradition and modernity, 1662-1923**

Disasters are constructed events shaped by the narratives that tie them together and attribute 'catastrophic' meaning to them. In Japan, specialized publications with their own narrative and visual traditions routinely appeared after natural disasters, offering a kind of ritualized form to structure disaster events and to cope with them. These traditions influence media representations of natural disasters in Japan to this day.

Large-scale natural disasters, such as earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions, which regularly plague Japan, met a growing popular print culture in the Edo period. When commercial print culture took off in the 17th century, natural disasters became a widely popular topic in both one-page woodblock prints (*kawaraban*) and books (*kusazōshi*), which quickly formed their typical narratives, tropes, and explanatory patterns. These included detailed descriptions and visual representations of the space affected by the disasters, standardized narratives of individual disaster experiences, astrological and other explanations for the disaster, expressions of gratitude towards authorities for their support of reconstruction, and visual satire. With the introduction of modern technology with the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century, Japanese print culture underwent a major transformation, but many of the traditional elements of disaster representations persisted.

This paper explores traditions of disaster narratives in Japanese print media since the Edo period and looks at their continuities and transformations through the advent of Western technology. Examining disaster narratives in Japan, the question arises whether the concept of 'catastrophe', which is rooted in explicitly European narrative traditions, can be applied to other disaster cultures.

*Julia Mariko Jacoby is a PhD candidate at the University of Freiburg, Germany. Her PhD research has also led her to the Universities of Osaka and Tokyo, the University of Constance and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. Her PhD project, Disaster Preparedness in Japan and Global Transfer of Knowledge, 1890-1970, analyzes the impact of natural disasters on Japanese society and the implementation of strategies against them, and thus traces the development of the modern disaster preparedness system in Japan, setting it into the context of global expert knowledge production and circulation of disaster related knowledge.*

Marie-Hélène Huet

## **Fire and ashes: The red skies of Krakatau**

The Krakatua volcano eruption started on August 25 1883 and reached its paroxysmal phase two days later. It was described by Camille Flammarion and his contemporaries as “the greatest geological phenomenon ever recorded in history”. Awestruck witnesses described a mass “alight with flickering flames rising behind a dense dark cloud,” “an immense wall with bursts of lightning like large serpents rising through the air”. At dusk, “the black wall became a blood-red curtain, with the edges of all shades of yellow; the whole of a murky tinge with fierce flashings of lightning” . The sound of the explosion was heard thousands of miles away. The sun appeared to be green and strange sunsets with twilight glows turning from yellowish-purple to brick-red and crimson were observed from Sydney to India and European countries. An observer from Germany thought he had never seen a spectacle of “greater splendor”.

In 2004, a team of astro-Physicists argued that Edvard Munch had witnessed the blood-red sunsets observed for several months over Norway, and that he had remembered his experience when he painted the red sky of the *Scream*. Art critics were quick to attack the claim as too reductive, but the brouhaha that followed made visible what could be described as an aesthetics of disaster, and, more specifically, disasters associated with fire. I would propose to discuss a series of images associated with volcanic eruptions, from a representation of subterranean fire by Kircher, to etchings of Krakatua’s eruption and illustrations of heavenly phenomena.

*Marie-Hélène Huet is M. Taylor Pyne emerita Professor of French at Princeton University. She is the author of several books on cultural history,*

*including Monstrous Imagination (Winner of the 1994 Harry Levine Prize in Comparative Literature) and The Culture of Disaster (2012).*

## **Panel session 4 – Memories that matter**

Tanja Kilzer

### **Symbols of hope and overcoming a health disaster**

The „Great Plague of Vienna “of 1679/80 was one of the most terrible health disasters that affected Austria and also the European continent. Contemporary reports tell about the horrible situation, the terrible death of over 80.000 residents and of course about people who lived in permanent anguish as well as fear of life inside the city and Austrian countryside.

Although caused by fleas, rats and rodents introduced from other countries and inadequate hygiene, lots of people regarded the health disaster as a punishment of God for a sinful life.

Some priests called the fearful residents to common prayers as well as penances and gave rise to a higher sense of community, while others fed resentments against strangers, wise women or people of different faith. In search of a culprit the health disaster had emerged also to a social disaster full of exclusion, xenophobia, serious mortal fear and panic of God's judgement. But while some panicked others stood together or created signs of hope in desolate time.

Lots of paintings, architectural decorations and also memorials like the famous Austrian Plague Columns in Vienna and other cities of the Habsburg Empire that have been established or painted during and in the aftermath of the disaster shown us today the great impact of the Great Plague on society. While some of the paintings, decorations and memorials show us the situation during the disaster and describe the awful fear of death, illness and weakness, there are also artistic works full of hope and gratitude to God during and after the catastrophe.

Especially the plague columns with their impressive iconography developed to an important symbol for the victory over health disasters and against despair in hopeless times. Even today, during the Covid-19 pandemic, lots of people are visiting the columns and leave candles, messages of hope, and signs asking for protection.

The presentation will focus on the representation and iconography of the “Great Plague of Vienna and Austria” in Paintings, decorations and specifically plague columns as well as the memory culture surrounding the disaster till today and its impact on Austrian society.

*Tanja Kilzer is research associate at the Department of Architecture at the University of Siegen and a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Art History, University of Cologne. She completed a master's in art history and archaeology in 2017 and a second one in medieval studies and history also in 2017. During her studies of art history, she focuses on architecture and art of the 17th century until today.*

Julian Zimmermann

## **Catastrophes written in stone: Inscriptions as permanent disaster commemoration between pre-modern and modern times**

Inscriptions can be understood as a sort of durable media that communicate messages not only in the framework of a specific place but also in a permanent way of public messages (Favreau, 1979). Furthermore, the specific ways of communicating in a public sphere constitute inscriptions as a potential sort of mass-media in pre-modern times (Von der Höh, 2006). As that, they communicate in a public place with a wider audience and commemorate collective reminiscences of disasters for a long time.

Overlooking inscriptions dealing with catastrophes in pre-modern times (especially in the later middle ages) and after 1500, researchers may observe some interesting proceedings on dealing with the memory of disasters in European societies. In comparison to the use of inscriptions as mass-media as well as important part of memorial cultures in pre-modern times and their continuous use after the invention of new sorts of mass media (for instance as consequence of letterpress printing), inscriptions seem to be fundamentally one of the major media for remembering disasters, regardless of the general historical epoch and other potentially available communication media.

Drawing from these observations, I will compare different catastrophe inscriptions from different times and places in Europe in order to discuss the outstanding role of inscriptions for commemorating disasters. Especially the durable public sorts of communicating seem to be important for

remembering catastrophes in the ‘collective memory’ (J. Assmann) as well as a specific sort of dealing with the (asserted) resilience of the community. To discuss this thesis, I am consulting selected catastrophe inscriptions (dealing with earthquakes, fires and floods) from different European cities (for example Rome, Strasbourg, Basel, etc.). The aim is to work out how inscriptions shaped the discourse on disasters and furthermore, how the choice of this specific medium influences the memory of catastrophes.

*Julian Zimmermann studied history, philosophy and archaeology in Freiburg i. Brsg., Germany and Rome, Italy. After his state examination in 2017, he was a graduate student at the University of Basel, Switzerland with a starting grant of the Basel Graduate School of History from 2018 to October 2019. Since November 2019, he is part of the scientific staff of the graduate school “Metropolität in der Vormoderen (pre-modern metropolises)” at the University of Regensburg in Germany and permanent lecturer at the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) at the Faculty of Language and Area Studies in Freiburg. i. Brsg, Germany.*

Adriaan Duiveman

## **Breaking the cycles of catastrophe: Disaster, time, and nation in Dutch flood commemoration books, 1757-1800**

Historians argued that eighteenth-century Dutch ministers, poets and other authors interpreted disasters in a overarching decline narrative. Cattle plagues, ship worms and floods were understood as signs of an escalating political, economic and – most importantly – moral crisis. In this paper, I argue that this was a prominent perspective on disasters, but it was not the only one. Instead of escalating signs of total decline, authors also interpreted catastrophes as cycles stretching back centuries.

Perceptions of time shifted in eighteenth-century Europe. A linear temporality occurred in the minds of people. However, cyclical understandings of time did not just disappear. Both temporalities occurred alongside one another. My paper analyses the representations of major Dutch flood disasters – 1757, 1775 and 1799 – in four contemporary flood commemoration books. I argue that authors interpreted inundations, those that happened recently and those in the distant past, from both a linear and cyclical temporal perspective.

The stories of floods in the commemoration books aimed to connect inhabitants of 'the Fatherland'. The reports of authors covered wide geographical areas and pressed readers to feel with victims in other regions than their own. In addition, their books also connected the Dutch through time: their ancestors suffered, and so would the progeny. However, some authors also provided hope. Technological innovation or moral improvement could break the cycles of catastrophe.

*Adriaan Duiveman is a PhD candidate at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He investigates the relation between identity and solidarity in (representations of) disasters in the eighteenth-century Netherlands. In 2019, Duiveman was selected as one of the Faces of Science of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. He won the Elise Mathilde Essay Prize 2021 of the Society of Dutch Literature and the Royal Netherlands Historical Society.*

## Keynote 2

Rebecca Totaro

### Accounting for “great” plagues, earthquakes, and floods

A survey of early modern cheap print pamphlets makes clear that one city's great flood is not another's, and one generation's great plague is not another's -- such that we might be suspicious of the use of “great” to qualify plagues, earthquakes, floods, famines, hurricanes, and other natural hazards in these texts. At the same time, we know that for an individual or community to articulate its suffering and to assign it meaning does not require a scientific or historical assessment of the initiating crisis event. In other words, my experience of suffering and loss is my own to weigh.

Holding together in check the big history and micro-history approaches to these texts, my research and my talk today take inspiration from the work of my fellow conference presenters, with your collective focus on local catastrophe and its impact on identity formation, and from Scott Oldenburg's book *A Weaver-Poet and the Plague Labor, Poverty, and the Household in Shakespeare's London* (2020). In this talk, I will share my cheap print survey of the “great” plagues and earthquakes in England as well as some of Dr. Oldenburg's findings on the plague-time writing of London weaver William Muggins. In close, I will suggest ways we might build from here, uncovering the lived experience of our forebears and, in the process, enhancing our psychological proximity to them and to others in our current time of crisis.

*Rebecca Totaro is Associate Dean of Curriculum and Assessment and Professor of English at Florida Gulf Coast University. A book series editor for Penn State University Press, Totaro has served as an invited to speaker on bubonic plague at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and at the Folger Shakespeare Library, where she has held a fellowship. The most recently published of her five books on plague and early modern disaster is *Meteorology and Physiology in Early Modern Culture: Earthquakes, Human Identity, and Textual Representation* (2017).*

## Keynote 3

Christian Rohr, University of Bern

### **Disaster memory and “banished memory”. General considerations and case studies from Europe and the United States (19th–21st centuries)**

In 1981, German medievalist and cultural historian Arno Borst provided an early case study of an extraordinary natural disaster in his essay “The earthquake of 1348” (published in German in the renowned “Historische Zeitschrift”). In this article, he put forward the thesis that today’s societies in Europe have largely eliminated dealing with natural disasters from their everyday lives, and that they have become a “society of banished memory” (in German: “Katastrophenverdrängungsgesellschaft”). This is in contrast to pre-modern societies, which have integrated the risk of fires, natural disasters, weather anomalies, etc. far more into their everyday lives. Indeed, in many societies that are exposed to recurring natural risk, “cultures of disaster” (Greg Bankoff) can be identified, be it “flood cultures” on the rivers of Central Europe and on the North Sea coast in the pre-modern era or “earthquake cultures” in the Mediterranean area. Numerous forms of memory were omnipresent in these cultures as a form of “mental prevention”, from clearly visible flood marks to house chronicles about avalanches.

With the “taming” of natural hazards through river straightening and protective structures of all kinds, especially since the 19th century, small and medium-sized events have generally been avoided, but then serious events occurred even more surprising by hitting the population unpreparedly. A prolonged absence of extreme events, a “disaster gap” (Christian Pfister), could thus significantly increase the catastrophic nature of a new event. The belief that technical precautions could be used to get a grip on natural hazards was shaken in many places towards the end of the 20th century. This keynote lecture analyses selected flood, avalanche, storm and earthquake events from Europe and North America (late 19th century to present) to show, which factors might have contributed to a reshaping of memory cultures after catastrophic events and which even strengthened a behaviour of banishing memory against better judgement.

*Christian Rohr is a Full Professor of Environmental and Climate History at the University of Bern (Switzerland), working both at the Institute of History and the interdisciplinary Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research. He studied History and antique and medieval Latin at the University of Vienna, where he obtained his PhD in 1995. During his time as Assistant Professor and later on Associate Professor of Medieval History at the Institute of History, University of Salzburg (1996-2010) his research started to concentrate on nature-induced disasters, climatic fluctuations and conflicts over natural resources in the medieval and early modern period. Since being in Bern from 2010 onwards, he widened his scope also on modern and contemporary environmental history.*

## Panel session 5 – Moving readers

Andrew G. Newby

### **'Eating off their own fingers': Disaster charity campaigns in the absence of images**

A decade after some of the most horrific descriptions of the Great Irish Famine, new reports of famine victims reached the British public, this time from northern Europe. The Finnish famine of 1856-7 presaged a decade of widespread suffering, culminating in the nadir of 1867-8, when 10% of the national population perished through hunger or famine-related diseases. As in Ireland, British Quakers, were prominent in the Finnish relief effort. In both cases, vivid depictions of the suffering were used to prick the national conscience. It was reported, for example, that children “had eaten up their own fingers,” and that “dead people with straw stubble in their mouths” were to be found lying in the streets. The references to infant self-cannibalism were undoubtedly designed to shock, and prompt a charitable response from the British public, but there is also a significant contrast with Ireland. In Ireland, first-hand narratives helped the Quakers convey the extent of the suffering. In the Finnish appeal of 1857, the most distressing imagery – the story of the self-cannibalism was reproduced around the world over the next two months – was at least a fourth-hand account by the time it reached British eyes. Moreover, it was of dubious provenance, referring to a specific incident that has occurred not within the Finnish state, but in neighbouring Sweden. This paper compares depictions of Irish and Finnish victims, discusses the way in which famine imagery circulated around the world in the mid-nineteenth century, and how such imagery was used in the context of philanthropy in in Victorian society.

*Andrew G. Newby is University Lecturer in Nordic Studies, Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, Finland. He was educated at the Universities of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, and prior to his current post worked as lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, senior lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, and senior research fellow at three Institutes for Advanced Study (Helsinki, 2010-12; Aarhus, 2017-18; Tampere, 2018-20). He has written and edited many works on different aspects of northern European history, society and culture, and between 2012 and 2017 he held an Academy of Finland*

*Senior Research Fellowship, as principal investigator of the project “The Terrible Visitation, Famine in Finland and Ireland, c. 1845–1868: Transnational, Comparative and Long-Term Perspectives.”*

Fons Meijer

## **Suffering compatriots: Affect, nationalism and the construction of compassion in times of catastrophe in the 19th-century Netherlands**

Why do nations command such profound emotional legitimacy? This was one of the central questions of Benedict Anderson’s 1983 seminal study *Imagined Communities*. Only recently, historians have turned their full attention to the affective dimensions of nationalism and national identification. They argue that emotions and feelings are key to understanding the strong pull of nationalism on the lives of people. My paper will single out one of such ‘national emotions’, that is: compassion with fellow countrymen. Focussing on the Netherlands of the nineteenth century, I show how moments of major catastrophe – such as explosions, river floods and storm surges – were appropriated by various kinds of authors and artists to disclose the suffering of countrymen in the struck area. They invited the public to affectively identify with the victims’ anguish and misery, gave shape and meaning to these feelings of compassion and, as such, laid the emotional groundworks for strong ties of national unity and belonging.

*Fons Meijer is a PhD candidate at the Radboud Institute of Culture & History (RICH) at Radboud University in Nijmegen. His doctoral research addresses nationalism and processes of nation building in the wake of major disasters in the 19th-century Netherlands. Before, he studied history at Radboud University and the University of Sheffield (UK), during which he specialised in the modern political and social history of Western Europe, with a specific interest in identity formation, political representation and media culture.*

Tess Somervell

## **A safe operating space: Sermons on the Great Storm of 1703**

In England, the majority of literary responses to the Great Storm of 1703 were printed sermons. Most of these had been preached on 19th January 1704, the fast-day appointed to commemorate the storm. In this paper I draw upon modern disaster and media studies, such as Richard Grusin's theory of 'premediation', in order to analyse how these sermons constructed a 'safe operating space' for their audiences, as the comparable phenomenon in modern climate change discourse has been labelled. Certain features recur in the sermons: self-conscious navigation between the 'first cause' of the storm (God's judgment) and 'secondary' or 'natural causes'; assertion that the storm was not an isolated event, but part of a longer series of calamities; and a reluctance to pinpoint a specific moral cause for God's punishment of England. I argue that the sermons combine these features in order to portray a storm that might have been diverted or deferred, but which was sufficiently complex that speculation about an alternative history in which the storm did not arrive was almost impossible. This leads to a fourth feature common across the sermons in their temporal framing of the disaster. Instead of focusing on the past before the storm as a missed opportunity to avert catastrophe, they portray the present and near future as a period of calm in which moral reformation must be carried out in order to prevent further catastrophe. Whereas sermons that were delivered sooner following the storm—such as John Cockburn's, preached in the English Church in Amsterdam just one day after the storm—are more willing to reflect on failures that immediately preceded the event, the fast-day sermons place greater emphasis on the special quality of the post-catastrophic present as an opportunity to act and shape the desired future.

*Dr Tess Somervell is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of English at the University of Leeds. Her current project is titled 'Georgic Climates: Writing the Weather in Eighteenth-Century Poetry'. Previously she was Research Assistant on the AHRC-funded project 'British Romantic Writing and Environmental Catastrophe', also at Leeds. She is Membership Secretary of the British Association for Romantic Studies.*

## Panel session 6 – Landscape and region

Daniel Moerman

### **'Um diese zeit war es ser trocken': Chronicling droughts and their consequences in the Netherlands, 1550-1850**

During the last two summers, the Netherlands have suffered from episodes of severe droughts. Because droughts are common and recurring natural phenomena, although differing in strength and severity, they are not often recognised as disasters. Yet the consequences of droughts: dry soil, water scarcity, and fires, sometimes have disastrous consequences for larger and smaller societies. Recently, climate historians led by Christian Pfister and Rudolf Brázdil have invigorated research into major historical droughts, especially for central Europe. Dutch weather historians, such as Jan Buisman, have noted historical droughts for the Netherlands, but only by exception. Large-scale research into the impact of historical droughts in the Netherlands started only recently.

Certain droughts, such as the 'megadrought' of 1540, had major societal and cultural consequences throughout Europe. People had to radically adjust their lives to the fact that drinking water became scarce, rivers unnavigable, and fires a common hazard in towns everywhere (e.g. Pfister, 2017/2018). Many of these drought events and the societal responses can be reconstructed through the study of a multitude of local and regional chronicles, which are a major source for past experiences of weather and its consequences, in the pre-instrumental period and afterwards. This paper presents an investigation into a large body of digitised chronicles from the Netherlands, with the aim of gaining more insight into the history of droughts and their socio-cultural consequences in the Netherlands between roughly 1550-1850. We aim to answer the following questions: 1) How were droughts described in particular, what were the most common topoi chroniclers used? 2) What kind of responses to droughts do chronicles describe? 3) How do the descriptions of drought events chronicles change over time? Taking a cultural-environmental approach, this paper aims to provide new knowledge and insights into the different ways people perceive and deal with changes in natural circumstances.

*Dániel Moerman studied history and philosophy at the University of*

*Groningen, receiving his MA in 2019. After a brief period as post-graduate lecturer, he gained a PhD-position in the NWO-sponsored project 'Coping with Drought: An environmental history of drinking water and climate adaptation in the Netherlands,' at the VU. His research focuses particularly on cities in the eastern Netherlands, in which he applies his expertise as an early modern historian specialised in socio-cultural approaches to crisis and resilience, this time with an environmental twist.*

Sophie van Os

## **Drawing distress: Disaster and regional character in the nineteenth-century periodical press**

During the Great Irish Famine (1845-1851) many illustrated newspapers, including the Illustrated London News, The Graphic, and the Illustrated Times, devoted considerable space in their columns to the ongoing distress in rural Ireland. These harrowing reports of hunger, eviction, death, and mass emigration were often accompanied by sketches and wood-engravings which functioned as modes of visual reportage and entertainment. This was not uncommon, as illustrations in the illustrated periodical press communicated a rhetoric of immediacy and authenticity and did not only function as visual language, but also reliably boosted sales as visual coverage of war, crime, royalty, and especially disaster helped to sell papers (Shattock, 2017). Although various works (Hockings, 2014; Gillissen, 2015; Janzen Kooistra; 2017; Tilley, 2020) have examined the illustrations of disasters in the nineteenth-century periodical press in light of the ideological position of the analysed periodical and the audience it cultivated, these studies have overlooked depictions of regional character that often appeared alongside illustrations of disaster. Following this observation, this paper will examine the representation of local colour in relation to illustrations of disaster, paying special attention to circulating images of the Irish Famine, recurring visual templates in Britain and Europe, patterns of focalisation, and visual signifiers associated with particular Irish regions. Using the depiction of local traditions associated with the Connemara cottier as an exemplary case study, this paper will give new insight into the ways in which the Irish Famine was depicted in the periodical press, and bring to light how regional character and local traditions interacted with drawings of distress and disaster.

*Sophie van Os is a PhD candidate at the Radboud University Nijmegen,*

*the Netherlands. Her research project titled “Transnational Dimensions of the Region in European Illustrated Periodicals, 1842-1900” which is part of the NWO-funded VICI project ‘Redefining the Region: The Transnational Dimensions of Local Colour’ examines the transnational dimensions of the region in European illustrated periodicals from the long nineteenth century. Sophie, additionally, teaches several Bachelor courses at the Radboud University, and is a postgraduate researcher for the Irish Women’s Writing Network.*

Hanneke van Asperen

## **The landscape as wounded body in visual images of disasters, 17th-18th century**

Floods occurred with some frequency in the delta of the Dutch Republic, and some of the more serious ones gave rise to an abundance of images, among which many prints. Well-known and successful printmakers such as Romeyn de Hooghe (1645- 1708), Jan Luyken (1649- 1712), and Simon Fokke (1712- 1784) are known to have depicted floods and other disasters. Although the function of prints could vary the artists often adopted formats intended to evoke mercy in the viewer. To achieve this goal the printmakers based some of their more innovative designs on unexpected, but suitable models: religious images of Christ’s dead body. Standing in a long tradition harking back to the Middle Ages these images had successfully evoked mercy in the beholders. Using these images as their sources Fokke and other artists presented the landscape as a wounded body, and the community in mourning.

*Hanneke van Asperen is an art historian affiliated with Radboud University Nijmegen. She is postdoctoral researcher for the NWO Vici-project Dealing with Disasters in the Netherlands: The Shaping of National and Local identities, led by Prof. dr Lotte Jensen. Her fields of expertise include pilgrimage badges, religious manuscripts, the iconography of charity and images of disasters.*

## Panel session 7 – Blame and conflict

Anneloek Scholten

### **The Dutch rinderpest in local colour fiction: Religion, legend, and the rhetoric of blame**

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Dutch farmers were plagued by outbreaks of the rinderpest. The plague of 1865-1867 killed roughly fifty percent of Dutch cattle, and featured prominently in the news: initial reports focused on the outbreak in England, and newspapers from across the country reported on the spread of the disease. Although scientific understanding of the rinderpest improved over the course of the eighteenth century, the belief that the rinderpest was God's punishment for mankind's sins remained widespread.

Existing studies consider how religious understandings of the rinderpest affected attempts at treatment and prevention, but there is a paucity of scholarship on the sociocultural (rather than agricultural or economic) effects of these understandings in rural communities. The proposed paper aims to fill this gap by looking at the rhetoric of accountability and blame in narrative constructions of the rinderpest, taking Josef Cohen's *Ver van de menschen* (1910) as a case study. Part of an emerging Dutch tradition of local colour writing, in which natural disasters often play a prominent role, this novel describes how the cattle plague affects the rural population of a small community in Salland, Overijssel.

Although the rinderpest is explicitly described as a threat from outside (arriving from England), *Ver van de menschen* shows how external disasters threaten social cohesion and community. Farmers unite in blaming the Strie family for the cattle plague because of a legend, according to which the sins of the family bring disaster to the area. The community slowly crumbles, and financial losses force farmers to sell their property to German investors. This paper considers the novel's negotiation of responsibility and blame in light of the discourse surrounding the rinderpest in newspapers and periodicals, focusing particularly on the way it constructs the relationship between individual/community and local/foreign in coming to terms with this disaster.

*Anneloek Scholten is a PhD candidate at Radboud University. Her research,*

*which is part of the NWO VICI-funded project 'Redefining the Region: The Transnational Dimensions of Local Colour,' focuses on transnational perspectives on nineteenth-century Dutch and Flemish local colour fiction.*

Lilian Nijhuis

## **The role of hubris in poems on the Delft Thunderclap (1654)**

The genre of occasional poetry flourished in the seventeenth century, and the disaster was one such occasion on which poems were frequently written. Many of these poems reflect the peccatogenic outlook that was common in the early modern period, attributing the occurrence of a disaster to the sins of the people affected by it.

However, not all poems in which a disaster is interpreted as a divine punishment adhere to this peccatogenic model. This paper takes the gunpowder disaster in Delft in 1654 – come to be known as the 'Delft Thunderclap' and sparking as many as fourteen poems known today – as a case study. More specifically, it uses the poem on this occasion by poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) as its central case to argue that the concept of hubris is relevant to the understanding of early modern dealing with disasters as well, here manifesting itself in the way man relates to nature. It shows that a Christian interpretation of disaster was not necessarily fuelled by the peccatogenic worldview but could also be rooted in the classical, literary tradition.

*Lilian Nijhuis (1995) completed a bachelor's in Dutch Language and Culture (2016) and a research master's in Literary Studies (2018) at Radboud University. Her PhD project, which is part of the NWO Vici project 'Dealing with Disasters in the Netherlands. The Shaping of Local and National Identities, 1421-1890', focuses on the literary reflection on disaster in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.*

Adam Sundberg

## **Building the social cascade: Connecting culture, disaster, and persecution in the 1730s**

A diverse body of scholarship suggests that natural disasters influence the likelihood of social violence and persecution. Historians have contributed

to this work by analyzing the relationships between linked social and environmental crises in the past. Most scholarship emphasizes the roles of social networks, shared infrastructural and economic vulnerabilities, and environmental forces that directly conditioned the broadening of crises beyond an initial hazard impact. These functionalist explanations often privilege social and material pathways of interdependence. The influence of culture, by contrast, tends to fit awkwardly into explanatory models that link social stress, persecution, and natural disasters. Although few disaster scholars would deny that culture exerts an important influence in disaster perception, it tends to operate as a black box of background conditions, transforming lived experience into decision-making and response.

This presentation will explore an alternate interpretation of connectivity between two seemingly disconnected episodes of disaster and persecution in the 1730s. The first was a wave of sodomy trials and executions that spanned the Republic. A classic moral panic, it was the deadliest episode of sodomy persecution in Early Modern Europe. The second was the famous shipworm epidemic, which catalyzed a water management crisis and short-lived existential panic. On the surface, little connects these phenomena. They were catalyzed by sequences of events separated by several months and across half the width of the Republic. They largely occupied different spheres of social concern. Save a select group of moralizing publications, these phenomena appear largely independent of one another in the historical record.

I argue that the sodomy persecution and the shipworm epidemic of the 1730s were integral components of what disaster scholar Susan Cutter calls a “social cascade”. Rather than background conditions, the social ecology and cultural milieu of the Dutch Republic established pathways and set the bounds for causal stories that knit social, environmental, and cultural crises together. The sodomy persecutions and shipworms responded to a shared set of social ecological conditions that fostered perennial crises during the early eighteenth century. On their own, these conditions did not trigger panics, nor did they explain their connections. The cultural perception of these structural conditions, harnessed via resignification to an emerging metanarrative of decline, supplied an important causal link. This approach identifies a process through which multiple crises refashion environmental, social, and cultural pathways, linking chains of causation into a social cascade.

*Adam Sundberg is an assistant professor of history at Creighton University in Omaha, USA. Sundberg's work focus on the environmental and cultural history of disaster in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic. His work appears in several journals, including Environmental History, Dutch Crossing, and the Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History. His first book, entitled Natural Disasters at the Closing of the Dutch Golden Age: Floods, Worms, and Cattle Plague, is under contract with Cambridge University Press.*

## **Panel session 8 – Foreseeing the Apocalypse**

Laszlo Kontler

### **Earthquakes, the end of the world, and perspectives on the Last Judgment 1686–1756**

In an important thrust of recent scholarship, the Enlightenment is represented as a series of debates about the pursuit of happiness in this world, irrespective of ideas held about the next one. The larger question this case study addresses is the impact of the 'new science' on notions of the end of the world in the Age of Enlightenment. It focuses on the discussion of natural catastrophes, particularly earthquakes, in English language secular and religious texts. The authors of these texts discussed the natural causes of such events extensively, and some of them contemplated the possibility of a disaster that might result in the physical annihilation of the earth. However, they usually made strenuous efforts to accommodate these observations in an explanatory framework dominated by notions of divine providence, and sometimes wrath and punishment. Only exceptionally did it occur to them to connect this theme with the pursuit of this-worldly happiness and a requisite secular ethics.

*László Kontler is professor of history at Central European University (Budapest and Vienna). His research and publications focus on intellectual history, the history of political thought, translation and reception, and the production and circulation of scientific knowledge in early modern Europe, mainly the Enlightenment. His recent books include Translations, Histories,*

*Enlightenments: William Robertson in Germany, 1760-1795* (Palgrave, 2014) and (with Per Pippin Aspaas) *Maximilian Hell (1720-1792) and the Ends of Jesuit Science in Enlightenment Europe* (Brill, 2020).

Marieke van Egeraat

## **Selling apocalyptic interpretations of disasters in the sixteenth-century Low Countries**

The religious landscape of the sixteenth-century Low Countries was very diverse. Early on, the Reformation attracted followers, but they were never a majority in these regions. Later in the century, Calvinism and the Contra-Reformation only complicated the situation. Although Calvinism, at the end of the century, became the main religion within politics, in society at large religious diversity remained the norm. This religious context is reflected in the reactions given after disasters and other natural signs.

In this paper, I will focus on apocalyptic interpretations of disasters in Dutch pamphlets and chronicles. First, I will show that the apocalyptic interpretation was not as present in the Dutch context when compared to the German lands. I want to highlight this difference by contrasting a German pamphlet and a Dutch one, both written after disasters. Next, I will try to explain this difference by zooming in on selling practices of printers, the potential readership of these pamphlets and the polemical use of apocalyptic thinking.

As it will turn out, in the German lands apocalyptic explanations could be used to strengthen the group identity of the pamphlet readers. For the Netherlands, on the other hand, printers stayed away from such a polemical use, because their products were intended for readers of multiple religious groups.

*Marieke van Egeraat is a PhD candidate within the project Dealing with Disasters. The Shaping of Local and National Identities, 1421 – 1890 led by Lotte Jensen. Within this project, she focusses on the sixteenth-century Low Countries. She is especially interested in the way providence could be used after disasters to strengthen group identities.*

Jennifer Egloff

## **Earthquakes and end times: Apocalyptic interpretations of global disasters in the early modern Atlantic world**

Many early modern individuals living in Europe and the Americas considered earthquakes to be noteworthy events. They recorded them in their diaries, discussed them in letters, and read about them on broadsides and in pamphlets. Since earthquakes had the potential to be quite destructive, it is not surprising that individuals took a strong interest in earthquakes that happened in their vicinity. But, why did they care about earthquakes on the other side of the globe?

While a certain degree of morbid curiosity was likely present—especially when Protestants were reading about the devastating effects that earthquakes had on Catholic lands, and vice versa—interest in global disasters was not just salacious, but rather illustrates the broader significance that many early modern individuals ascribed to natural disasters. Both Protestants and Catholics believed that natural occurrences were the direct result of God's will, and were intended to send messages to humanity.

For instance, seventeenth-century Puritan New Englanders received news about far-off earthquakes via their Atlantic knowledge networks and utilized this information to reinforce and refine their millenarian viewpoints. Like many of their contemporaries, on both sides of the confessional divide, Puritans believed that the biblical Book of Revelation provided a narrative of how the apocalypse would unfold. By correlating descriptions from Revelation, with events that happened on Earth, individuals sought to determine where humanity was on God's apocalyptic timeline. This paper argues that the numerical details contained in earthquake reports were particularly significant to this endeavor. Specifically, the fact that these reports included the date—and often the time—at which these disasters occurred was intended to enable individuals to better correlate natural events with those in Revelation and thus fine tune their predictions about when Judgment Day would occur.

*Jennifer Egloff earned her PhD in Early Modern Atlantic History and the History of Science from New York University. Combining her undergraduate training in Mathematics with her graduate training in History, Egloff's*

*research explores the multivalent ways that Anglophone individuals utilized numerical methods and mathematical techniques to attempt to face the challenges brought on by the opening of the Atlantic to increased exploration and commerce, competing religious philosophies, and the increased availability of information. A strong advocate of interdisciplinarity, Egloff is a member of the History and Social Sciences faculty at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, where she teaches a broad range of courses.*













