

Learned Letters from Italy Classical Rome, Vesuvius, and Etna in *Philosophical Transactions* (1665-1700)

Manuela D'Amore
(Università degli Studi di Catania, Italia)

Abstract The study of the relations that the Royal Society established with Italy in the years 1665-1700 has generally been neglected by academic debate. Our purpose here is to show that there is still a lot to learn from the huge amount of letter articles that were published in vols. 1-22 of the Society's scientific journal, *Philosophical Transactions*, and that the type of information that its first two editors, Henry Oldenburg (c. 1619-1677) and Edmond Halley (1656-1742), circulated since 1665 was not only related to the field of Natural Philosophy, but also contributed to arouse prospective travellers' interest in the *Bel Paese* and its artistic and naturalistic treasures. Seen from an intertextual perspective, and divided into two macro text-based and thematic sections, the writings connected with the city of Rome, Vesuvius, and Etna will demonstrate that the journal's editorial choices were in perfect harmony with the literary trends of the time, and that the main socio-cultural phenomenon of the Enlightenment, that of the Grand Tour, has its roots in the scientific exchanges that English learned academies wanted to have since the late Stuart Era.

Summary 1 Introductory Issues: the Royal Society, Italian Culture, and Stuart London. – 2 Writing on Ancient Rome before the Grand Tour: Pillars, Urns, and Catacombs. – 3 Destructive Earth: Eruptions and Earthquakes in Naples and Catania. – 4 Conclusions: The Royal Society and the Grand Tour of Italy in the Enlightenment.

Keywords The early *Philosophical Transactions*. Rome. Vesuvius. Etna.

1 Introductory Issues: the Royal Society, Italian Culture, and Stuart London

It is a fact that, since its foundation in 1660, the Royal Society wanted to establish solid and fruitful relations with the main scientific institutions in Europe (cf. Hunter 1994). It was so with the Parisian Académie des sciences (establ. 1666); it was so with the Florentine Accademia del Cimento (1657ca.-1675), whose members in particular were committed to the enhancement of the Galileian experimental method. When Henry Oldenburg founded *Philosophical Transactions* in 1665, though, it was much easier for the Society's Fellows to widen their network of contacts,

and take an active part in the cultural circuit of the Republic of Letters (cf. McDougall-Waters, Moxham, Fyfe 2014).

The role of Italy was immediately special. If France was Britain's most fearsome competitor at different levels, especially that of advanced technology (cf. Gibson 2004; Steadman 2013), it was virtually impossible for English virtuosi to ignore the high quality research that had always been carried out at the universities of Bologna, Pisa, and Rome. As for the interest that most of them had in Italian learned journals, the Venetian *Giornale de' Litterati* was certainly one of the most reliable sources of information both in the field of Natural Philosophy and of the humanities.

In fact, scientific news was not the Royal Society's only priority. It is true that the first letter articles that appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* were also about the «Anatomical Observations» by Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694) (*Phil. Trans.*, 1671, 6, pp. 2149-2150) and the latest astronomical discoveries by Giovanni Ciampini (1633-1698) (1685, 15, pp. 920-921), yet the charms and treasures of cities like Rome were meant to remind readers that the country continued to represent the highest level of excellence in the 'Philosophical Arts' too (cf. Smuts 2010).

This is to say that it is not possible to detach the contents of the early *Philosophical Transactions* from the cultural information that circulated in seventeenth century London. At that time, there continued to be strong interest in the Italian Renaissance masterpieces of political sciences (cf. Arienzo, Petrina 2013) - William Sancroft's *Modern Policies, Taken from Machiavel, Borgia, and other choice Authors* (1654) and *The Works of the Famous Nicholas Machiavel* (1680) - as well as of literature - Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1607), Battista Guarino's *Il Pastor Fido, The Faithfull Shepherd. A Pastorall* (1647), and Torquato Tasso's *Aminta, the Famous Pastoral* (1660) - as for the *Bel Paese's* immense artistic tradition, there is evidence that the Royalists not only appreciated it, but also that, especially in the 1670s, they wanted to take some of its most precious Baroque paintings and sculptures to London (cf. Levy Peck 2005, pp. 188-192).

Men of letters, men of science, and of Church, the Fellows of the Royal Society were fully aware of what made Italian culture appealing, and were even ready to anticipate socio-literary trends. When the Age of New Science started, and a new travel writing tradition was established (cf. Hayden 2012), the letter articles in *Philosophical Transactions* offered more effective tools for sea voyagers, and the 'Curiosities' in foreign countries were utilized to direct fluxes of travellers to those that were intellectually more stimulating.

Italy was one of them. First, though, it was necessary to give its unique cities clear cultural identities to encourage Britons to cross the Channel and the Alps: Rome, the 'Eternal City', for instance, immediately became *the* cradle of Classicism; Naples and Catania, with Vesuvius and Etna, were associated with breathtaking sights and destructive natural phenomena.

The Fellows' policy did not change in 1700-1800, when the Grand Tour was in full swing. The ancient Latin world, as well as the fierce volcanic activities in the Mediterranean south, continued to be at the heart of most of the 95 articles that *Philosophical Transactions* diffused from Italy, and, thanks to that intense editorial activity, a new page in the British history of travel could be written. It was paradoxically made of the archaeological treasures and the horrors that could be found down the Appian Way. At the end of the process, on the eve of the nineteenth century, the English grand tourists who had discovered Sicily had also learnt to confront its special (sublime) 'Other'.

2 Writing on Ancient Rome before the Grand Tour: Pillars, Urns, and Catacombs

So, the intellectual path that the Royal Society created to support learned travel had its roots in early Restoration London. Those were the years when Charles II wanted to encourage scientific progress and more open relations with the other European countries, so the Fellows wanted to contribute to such a new cultural policy.

The letter articles that appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* in 1665-1700 show that they were eager to know about the Continent, particularly the latest scientific discoveries in France, Germany, and Holland. There were also interesting writings specifically dedicated to the new developments of cartography, as well as interesting «Observations in travels from Venice though Istria, Dalmatia, Greece and Smyrna» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1676, 11, pp. 575-582), yet Italy was the only country that was systematically considered for the quality of learning and the level of excellence in the humanities.

The anonymous «An Account of the Tryalls, made in Italy of Campani's Optick Glasses» (1665, 1, pp. 131-132) was not an exception. It was only one of the pieces of medical research which had solid scientific bases, but it proved that there was immediately space for Italy in the prestigious journal. The following years were decisive to stimulate a wider range of cultural interests: taken from the «Ninth Italian Giornale de' Letterati», for instance, the account of the encomiastic work by Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647), *De Restituenda Salubritate Agri Romani* (1670, 5, pp. 2017-2019), was rich in cultured references, it was based on a thorough analysis of the «Antient state and disposition of the Roman 'Campagne'» (p. 2018), and, what is more important, it informed readers about the progress of Italian research in most branches of learning.

That article was extremely important. In fact, when the anonymous «Some Communications from Rome and Paris» described a «new Mapp»

of Rome by «Signor Buffalini» and the *Misura Universale* by «Signor Burrattini» (1675, 10, p. 309), the Fellows of the Royal Society had already acquired the ability to go beyond the limited borders of Natural Philosophy, and follow the latest literary and philosophical trends.

Of course, it was not enough to read about the news in the Italian editorial market. Those were the years when Inigo Jones's (1576-1652) interpretation of Palladian architecture was being re-discussed, (cf. Ayres 1997; Anderson 2007), so contributions like Gerardus Vossius's (1577-1649) «An Uncommon Inscription lately found on a very Basis of a Pillar, dug up in Rome» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1686-1692, 16, pp. 172-175), and the anonymous «Extract of a Letter» «concerning a Discovery made upon the Inundation of Tevere» (1686-1692, 16, p. 227), were considered precious as they drew the readers' attention to the immense cultural heritage in the city, and empowered the new Neoclassical mode.

There was more than a detailed list of culturally significant findings in those writings, however. Classical philology and archaeology were undergoing dramatic changes at the time, so fascinating objects such as the «perpetual Lamps that the Antient mention» (p. 227) provided evidence that, in order to decode past history's hidden messages, it was indispensable to carry out further scientific study in the field of Roman civilization, as well as continue to fuel Britons' interest in Latin as a language.

Philosophical Transactions effectively contributed to such an important challenge on the eve of the new century, in 1698. Taking cues from the latest archaeological activities in Yorkshire (cf. Newman and Cransstone 2009), and the strong enthusiasm about the Neoclassical mode (cf. *Phil. Trans.*, 1685, 15, pp. 1201-1202), Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725), an expert antiquary and a topographer, wrote to Martin Lister (1639-1712), vice-President of the Royal Society, about an ancient «Roman Sheild» (1698, 20, pp. 205-208) which gave him the opportunity to prove that linguistic and historical issues mattered. The large black and white drawing at the end of the letter embellished and clarified most descriptive passages in the letter article, yet the «three Words» that «the Romans» had for «a *Sheild*» - «Scutum, Parma, & Clypeus» (p. 206) - not only perfectly combined with the beautiful ornaments on the object's cover, but also reminded readers of the «Pride or Ostentation» that Julius Caesar took «in his Army» (p. 207).

That was not the only occasion when *Philosophical Transactions* mentioned the great Roman Emperor. More letters would refer to the main figures of the Latin world in the following years, which showed that, in the Enlightenment, the growing distrust of mysticism (cf. Korshin 2014, pp. 46-50) and the emergence of Rational Dissent (cf. Gascoigne, 2002; Hakonsen, 2006) could not weaken the Society's interest in Classical Rome.

In fact, that part of Western history and civilization had always been an essential component in English scholars' education, and the language of

science was still based on past documentary sources. When John Monro (1670-1740), a surgeon and a distinguished member of the University of Edinburgh, wrote «A Letter concerning the Catacombs of Rome and Naples» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1700, 22, pp. 643-650) *Philosophical Transactions* followed the new scientific mode, and proposed the testimonies of the early Christian tradition as fascinating mysteries that even «Antiquaries and Travellers» wanted to unveil (p. 643).

Not only did Monro greatly contribute to arouse curiosity for the growing number of treasures in Rome, but he also showed Britons' contradictory attitude towards Christianity. What he termed as «a Mighty Idea of the Catacombs», for instance, was «a work of that vastness, that the Christians in persecuting times had not number enough to carry on»; as for their use, it was there that the «Ancient Romans» «[burnt] the Bodies of their dead», or «[threw] those of the Slaves to rot» (p. 645). His choice to follow that interpretation line, and detach the origin of catacombs from Christian rituals, could also be found in the closing passages of his *Letter*:

Upon the whole, the Catacombs I humbly conceive were the Burying-places of the ancient *Romans*; at length the manner of Burning, which they received from the *Graecians*, coming by degrees to prevail universally, they fell under total neglect. This is the State in which the Primitive Christians must be suppos'd to have found them; 'tis not to be imagin'd they cou'd have made any use of them, at a time when 'twas the daily practice to lay up even the depositions of the Slaves in them; so that either the Christians made no use of them at all, or they never were the burying Place of the Slaves. (pp. 649-650)

Made of close observation and hypotheses, however, Monro's work was in harmony with the latest cultural trends, and could also be seen as an anticipation of the exchanges that the Fellows of the Royal Society had with their Anglo-Italian correspondents in the huge archaeological areas in Herculaneum (1738), Pompeii (1748), and Stabiae (1749). Apart from specific contents and readers' expectations, in those cases too, *Philosophical Transactions* wanted to give voice to the authors' discoveries, as well as scientific doubts and queries, thus creating a lively intellectual debate and new travel itineraries in the second half of the eighteenth century.

If the Neapolitan Kingdom attracted so many visitors when the Grand Tour was in full swing, at the beginning of the process, in 1660-1735, Rome was *the* Italian destination for learned Britons. It had first been made famous by Richard Lassels, the author of *Voyage to Italy* (1667), yet it was also thanks to *Philosophical Transactions* that it was considered an advanced centre of scientific learning and the symbol of all the positive values connected with Latin civilization. As Sweet puts it, France always represented the «pleasures of youth», and it was «feminine», whereas Rome

was associated with «solid», «manly», and «rational» attributes (2012, p. 24).

Evidence of Jeremy Black's conviction that most English visitors could never choose between the city's glorious past history and its «dark, gloomy» atmosphere (2010, p. 137) could also be found in the London book market of the time. Ideally following Sarotti's and Monro's descriptions of urns and catacombs, William Acton's «Roma Subterranea» was rich in «Skulls» and «Bones of Saints» (1691, p. 39), and sharply contrasted with the detailed descriptions of the city's stunning sites in William Bromley's *Remarks Made in Travels through France and Italy* (1693). As for more complex cross-cultural issues, the anonymous *Room for News, or News from Rome, Being a Dialogue between the Pope and the Devil* (1673a) and *The Character of a Papist* (1673b) had already proved that Britons found it difficult to accept the Roman 'Other', as well as its historical, political, and religious identity.

Philosophical Transactions continued to set higher educational standards, and to shape new cultural trends. Again, it was not possible to find any particular reports or comments on contemporary Romans – that is to say, on their morals and manners – but that was because the “Eternal City” was always the main centre of Classical civilization: it had been so in pre-Restoration times, when William Burton's *A Commentary on Antoninus. His Itinerary, or Journies of the Roman Empire* (1658) confirmed that its past treasures were at the root of learned travel in Italy, and it was so in 1740-1760, when Classicism was made even stronger by the huge archaeological excavations in the Neapolitan area, and persuaded English visitors to tour the Mediterranean south.

Things did not change in 1770s-1780s. At that time, despite the new Pre-Romantic vogue, the Royal Society and the Accademia degli Apatisti (1635-1783) wanted to strengthen their collaboration, and the prestigious journal was flooded by articles on ancient coins and inscriptions. However, there was also the south with its incredible sites: the «Convent of the Servites» in Naples, formerly the «Palace» of the fifteenth-century poet Sannazarus, the «Cathedral Church, or *Domo*» with St. Gennaro's inexplicable mysteries (1693, p. 293), as well as the «*Solfoterra*» and its «subterranean Fire» (p. 305). The latter in particular prepared foreign visitors for the spectacular view of Mount Vesuvius and its breathtaking sights. The following passage confirms that, going beyond Rome's glorious past, the soil of the Mediterranean south was rich in fascinating mysteries:

Here have been 22 Eruptions; and of late years they are observed to be much more frequent than formerly: When they happen, they are very dreadful, not only in respect of the noise attending them; but the Consequences; having buried two or three Cities and Villages; they always shake the Windows and Doors in *Naples*, making a kind of an Earthquake there. The Mountain is always on Fire, as appears from the

constant Smoak. Near it are very great quantities of Ashes, and huge Stones, so cinerated or calcined as to be of an incredible lightness. (pp. 316-317)

3 Destructive Earth: Eruptions and Earthquakes in Naples and Catania

Proof of the Fellows' continuous interest in southern Italy's naturalistic phenomena could be found in the early *Philosophical Transactions*: «A Relation of the Raining of Ashes, in the Archipelago, upon the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1665, 1, p. 377) appeared in vol. 1 in 1665, it reported on a special volcanic event which Henry Robinson, one of the Royal Society's occasional correspondents, had observed in the Gulf of Volo on the 6th December 1631, and it had solid scientific bases. The fact that «Mr. John Evelyn» (1682-1763) wanted to take some of those «Ashes before the Royal Society» clearly shows that a careful selection and close observation of geological samples and materials were essential to have a realistic vision of those which would soon be defined as «burnt Countr[ies]» (1669b, p. 5).

Robinson's «Relation» was not the only source of information about the destructive force of Nature in the Mediterranean area. In 1669, when a disastrous eruption devastated the Catanese area, London witnessed to the publication of at least two works about Etna and other Italian volcanoes: the brief but beautifully illustrated *Mount Aetna's Flames. Or, the Sicilian Wonder* (1669a) and *The Volcano's, or, Burning and Fire-vomiting Mountains Famous in the World*, «[c]ollected for the most part out of Kircher's *Subterraneous World*» (1669b). In a period when Britons seemed to be attracted to such extraordinary, mysterious phenomena, and scholarly interest in rocks formation and volcanoes was increasing dramatically (cf. Rudwick 2007), *Philosophical Transactions* used «An Answer to some Inquiries concerning the Eruptions of Mount Aetna» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1669, 4, pp. 1028-1034) and «A Particular Accompt of Divers Minerals, cast up and burned by the late Fire of Mount Aetna» (1669, 4, pp. 1041-1043) to demonstrate that the scientific discourse could be combined with ethnography.

It was not possible to know more about their «Inquisitive» but unknown authors. They were only said to be «Merchants [...] residing in Sicily» at the time, but their writings confirmed that, going beyond the idea that Vesuvius and Etna could only cause «ruine», «destruction», and death (1669a, p. 1), it was more and more necessary for scholars in the Age of New Science to make possible hypotheses about eruptive phenomena, and consider the special case of Sicily carefully:

Those [the Conflagrations] of *Aetna* in *Sicily*, and *Strongylus*, *Vulcano*, &c. of the *Lipparian* Islands; have no doubt their Submarine and Subterranean Communications with the *Italian*, *Vesuvian*, &c. also. The Soyl of *Sicily* springs with often and eternal fires; and the whole Island cavernous, producing Sulphur and Bitumen abundantly; whereby exceeding fertile, of old, and even to this very day. (1669b, p. 12)

However scientifically qualified, the Royal Society's contributors to *Philosophical Transactions* could not always offer scientific explanations for all volcanic phenomena, yet there were higher and more complex levels of communication that could be attained. In fact, for the first time, «An Answer to some Inquiries concerning the Eruptions of Mount Aetna» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1669, 4, pp. 1028-1034) provided information about how the local population in Catania was fighting against the lava. The original manuscript of the article shows that Henry Oldenburg wanted to edit it thoroughly, that in some cases, he even changed its narrative structure, but that he was strongly determined to include two specific passages in the final version of the text: that of the description of «the people busy in barricading the ends of some streets and passages, where they thought the fire might break in» (p. 1033), and that of the rivers of lava surrounding the Benedictine Monastery, one of the Baroque treasures in the heart of Catania:

[A]bout the latter end of this Month and the beginning of May [...] it [the lava] bent all its force against the City; and having wrought itself even with the Walls thereof, over it pass'd in divers places; but its chief fury fell upon a very stately Convent, which was that of the *Benedectins*, having large Gardens and other ground betwixt them and the Wall: Which when it had filled up, it fell with all its force on the *Convent*, where it met with strong resistance, which made it swell almost [...] as high, as the higher Shops in the Old London Exchange, the Convent being built much after that fashion, though considerably bigger. [...] 'Tis certain, had this Torrent fallen in some other part of the Town, it would have made great havock amongst their ordinary Buildings, but here its fury ceased the 4. of May, running hence forward in little channels or streams, and that chiefly into the Sea. (p. 1029)

Oldenburg may have chosen not to amend those two narrative sequences as they went far beyond the dry, scientific writings that normally appeared in *Philosophical Transactions*. However, it was also important to have a more clear idea of Sicily and its morphological features: the Fellows' interest in the region and its «Natural Things» was increasing dramatically, that is why some of them were already part of the Royal Society's «Repositories» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1673, 8, pp. 6158-6161).

Following Mr. Robinson's example, the article, written by «the intelligent and inquisitive Signor Paulo Boccone» (1633-1704), a botanist and the author of *Osservazioni Naturali* (1684), referred to that collection activity, and included a list of 'curiosities':

1. Of the un-common pieces of Coral red and white; of both which some are ramified in solid massy bodies; others (the rarer sort,) are Corallin incrustations upon truly wooden and branchy sticks, and do terminate in small and tender Corallin buttons or flowers [...].
2. A certain stony substance, that is fissile, and hath the scent of bitumen, complicated and laid together membrane-like, and found in the *Hyblean* mountains of *Sicily*, near *Milelli*, neighbouring upon the trown of *Augusta*, and the ancient *Megara* [...].
3. A not ordinary *sangui-suga* or Leech, found sticking fast in the fish called *Xiphias* or Sword-fish, slightly mention'd by *Gesner* in his book *de Aquatilibus* [...]. Our Presenter gives it the name of *Hirudo* or *Acus caudâ utrinque pennatâ*, because of its working, it self into the flesh, and sucking the blood of the said fish [...].
4. A parcel of *Sal Armoniac*, brought away from *Sicily*, where it had been gathered in the late fiery Eruption of Mount *Aetna* [...]. This Salt, *he saith*, some of it as yellow as saffron, some like citron-colour, some white, and some greenish; which colors though they may seem to come from the several Mines of Iron, Brass, &c. whence the Salt issues. (pp. 6158-6161)

In a sense, it was possible to establish an ideal relation between the articles centred on the ancient ruins in Rome and that detailed list of Sicilian 'curiosities'. An exceptional scientific community, the Royal Society was trying to systematize knowledge, so urns, catacombs, and geological-volcanic materials were considered the bases of a more accurate vision of past history and of the most remote regions in the south of Italy.

Needless to say, that was also an appeal both to carry out further research in those fields and visit such rich sites. Although there were not any other articles on the island in the scientific journal for many years, Britons' interest in that geo-cultural area continued, and learned travel was given even more solid bases. In fact, when the most devastating earthquake in modern Sicily destroyed most of its urban centres in 1692, numerous anonymous accounts flooded the London book market, and it seemed necessary to go beyond the editorial tradition of using fear and horror to attract readers. *A True and Exact Relation of the Terrible Earthquake which hapned in the City and Kingdom of Naples on the 5th June* (1688), for instance, had only explained how the city had become the symbol of «an unheard Catastrophe» (p. 4); even though the path towards James Hutton's *The Theory of the Earth* (1795) was still long (cf. Duffy 2013), *An Account of*

the Late Terrible Earthquake in Sicily (1693) showed that it was possible to reject sensationalism, and concentrate on serious scientific hypotheses. For the book's anonymous author, the origins of that disaster could be found in «the many great Rains and intense Heatings» of the period, or in the «Vapours of the Atmosphere», which «forced their way through all Obstacles that pent them in» (p. 6).

There could be more possibilities, though, and they were all carefully considered within the Royal Society's scientific circles. A geologist and an occasional contributor to *Philosophical Transactions*, Martin Hartop contributed to the debate with the idea that «th[ose] Tremblings of the earth proceed[ed] from the same incens'd matter, which finding a way at other times through the *Mongibello*, furiously broke out in Smoak and Fire» (*Phil. Trans.*, 1693, 17, p. 827). On the eve of the new century, such a rigorous approach had a strong impact on readership.

It was not possible to find any biographical information about – or any more writings by – Martin Hartop. However, because there was still curiosity about the 1692 earthquake, Edmond Halley, the journal's new editor, included one more letter article in vol. 17 of *Philosophical Transactions*. It was by Alessandro Burgos (1666-1726), a Catholic Bishop from Catania, and a Professor of Metaphysics at the University of Padua, the monuments which had been «ruined» or «shattered» in Palermo, Messina, and Enna were at the heart of his narrative (1693, 17, pp. 830-838), yet it was the city of Catania which was paid special attention. It was the main centre near the volcano – «Learning» was «in its Glory» there – and, because of its University, it was also called the «Sicilian Athens» (p. 833). The following passage shows how it changed after the earthquake:

[There was] nothing but a very thick Cloud of Dust in the Air. This was the scene of their Calamity. For of the magnificent *Catania* there is not the least Foot-step to be seen. All its Edifices are levell'd with the Ground, except the Chappel of St. *Agatha*, the *Rotunda*, the Castle of *Ursino*, the Walls that encompass'd, and a few mean Houses. There was a very great Destruction of the Inhabitants buried in the Ruines of the Bishop's Palace; the Steeple and Dome, where most of the City, frightened with *Friday's* Earthquake, were got together to carry the Reliques of St. *Agatha* in Procession. Many of the Nobility were saved under the Chappel of the Saint, and some of the Clergy. The number of the Dead was about 15000. (pp. 833-834)

Philosophical Transactions proved that Catania and its surrounding areas would become more and more important in the following years. Of course, Etna continued to be *the* site to visit, however, even those dramatic writings confirm that the city was rich in artistic and architectural treasures, and that it was culturally lively and stimulating. English traveller-savants

greatly benefited from that type of information in the Enlightenment, and, also thanks to the articles that learned academies and journals continued to circulate over the years, became motivated to cross the Strait of Messina, and both tour the city and the whole Eastern coast of Sicily.

It was difficult to stop the news about the 1692 disaster. The anonymous *The Earthquake* would be clear about the fact that the loss had been so great that it would «require a long time to repair it» (1694, p. 1), but Vincenzo Bonaiuto's detailed account of facts (*Phil. Trans.*, 1693, 18, pp. 2-10) gave English educated readers a far more realistic picture of the wounded land of Sicily. His continuous references to the Classics, Diodorus Siculus, and Pliny could not weaken the assumption that the «shake» had been «horrid» and «amazing» (p. 4):

In open places the Sea sunk down considerably, and in the same proportion in the Ports, and inclosed Bays, and the Water babbled up all along the shore.

The Earth opened in several places in very long clefts [...]. From those openings that were in the Valleys, such a quantity of Water sprung forth as overflowed a great space of ground, which to those that were near it, had a sensible Sulphureous smell, though in a low degree, and without that unpleasant stifling produced by the smoak of Brimstone.

In the Plain of Catania, an open space, it is reported, that from one of these clefts, narrow, but very long, and about Four Miles off the Sea, the Water was thrown forth altogether as Salt as that of the Sea. (p. 5)

Following the unknown «Merchants» who had written about the 1669 eruption, Bonaiuto's account also included information about the dramatic effects that such a «Universal Calamity» had on the local population. There was «Foolishness», «Madness», «Dulness», «Sottishness», and «Stolidity», as well as «Hypocondriack», «Melancholick», and «Cholerick» «Distempers» (p. 8). As for the horror and death in most urban centres in that part of Sicily, a detailed chart at the end of the letter informed readers that only 914 people survived the terrible earthquake in Catania, and that Ragusa and «Syracusa» respectively had 5.000 and 4.000 victims.

It was the first time that English learned readers could know about the heavy psychological consequences of such a disastrous natural event, however, that was not the only reason why «An account of the Earthquake in Sicilia» was so important. The starting point of a fruitful exchange that Bonaiuto continued to have with the main members of the Anglo-Sicilian legacy over the years (cf. Condorelli 2011, pp. 149-150), it was followed by his «Intorno al terremoto della Sicilia seguito l'anno 1693», which appeared in Paolo Boccone's *Museo di fisica* in 1697.

Bonaiuto's «Account» was the last piece of writing that *Philosophical Transactions* published about the south of Italy before the new century

started. The bases for the construction of a new image of its main but unknown regions had been laid, and, even though there still seemed to be little or no space for a serious reflection on cross-cultural issues, it was already possible to see what appealed to British learned readers, and what type of stereotypes they associated with the cities of Rome, Naples, and Catania.

In the long eighteenth century, the huge archaeological excavations and the fierce eruptive activities in the Neapolitan Kingdom increased the number of learned letters from the Mediterranean south, and convinced more and more voyagers to tour its most peculiar centres and regions. Once again, the Society gave high resonance to the major cultural and natural events of the time; once again, its archives showed that its intense editorial activity could be seen as a real *continuum* which even reinforced the clear image that Britons already had of those distant lands.

4 Conclusions: The Royal Society and the Grand Tour of Italy in the Enlightenment

The central position of the remains of the Classical civilizations, and of Vesuvius and Etna in the Grand Tour discourse has also been pointed out in recent studies. Rosemary Sweet's *Cities and the Grand Tour* (2012), Michel Delon's *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (2013), Sharon Ouditt's *Impressions of Southern Italy* (2013), and Edward Chaney's *The Evolution of the Grand Tour* (2014) are all based on the assumption that those elements led both to the «discovery» of the south of Italy and the construction of new travel itineraries in the second half of 1700. In fact, they gave English visitors the chance to appreciate «the vertiginous, trembling, and largely uninhabited tracts of [the] land[s]» down the Appian Way, and to confront a different idea of aesthetic perfection (Ouditt 2013, p. 88).

If academic research seems to have a clear understanding of the factors that made Central and Southern Italy popular in the English Enlightenment, it is also important to consider the origins of learned travel, and the Royal Society's special contribution. Not only did its Fellows generate and fuel interest in Campania and Sicily in particular, but they were also able to direct stronger and stronger fluxes of visitors there. Most of the articles that appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* from 1665 to 1800 confirm that the north of Italy was seen as the centre of scientific learning, whereas the south was gradually perceived as the only geo-cultural area where the formal perfection of Classical art perfectly combined with the 'sublime' force of Nature.

It may be for this reason that the Fellows finally lost interest in the city of Rome. Although the Grand Tour was in full swing, and the Royal So-

ciety's collaboration with the Accademia degli Apatisti kept the readers' interest in the ancient world alive, the number of letter articles about the city decreased – there were only 7 between 1714-1716 and 1774 – and the news from Campania and Sicily was considered more and more appealing.

It was at that point that the Grand Tour of the south started: 39 of the 95 letters that *Philosophical Transactions* received from the *Bel Paese* appeared in 1739-1760 to clarify the state of the art in the archaeological areas near Naples, particularly that of Herculaneum; as for the second half of the century, in 1760-1800, the geological and volcanic phenomena connected with Vesuvius and Etna became definitely predominant.

Of course, it was not just a matter of figures. Those writings were the product of both the tight Anglo-Italian relations and the cultural currents of the time, however, from 1665 to 1800, it was the journal's impact on readership that contributed to really change the English history of travel.

There is still a lot to research on at this level. David Kronick (1991) and Aileen Fyfe (McDougall-Waters, Moxham, Fyfe 2014) maintain that, until 1778, the number of copies that were distributed never exceeded one thousand, but that their penetration was very high as it was tied to the abstracts, reviews, and reprints of articles that appeared in several periodicals both in Great Britain and on the Continent. A more clear understanding of the factors which influenced the evolutionary phases of learned travel will have to be based on the large network of contacts that learned academies were able to establish with overseas countries since 1660, as well as their cultural policies. If at the beginning of the process, *Philosophical Transactions* used its correspondents to promote Rome as the main Italian destination, in 1738-1800, it made Naples, «the Paris of the Past», «the natural culmination of the Grand Tour» (Eisner 1993, p. 64; Scott Fox 2013, p. 50).

The idea of the Royal Society's writings as precious documentary resources in such a complex, multifaceted context, however, has also its roots in the Fellows' longer descriptions of the *Bel Paese*. Combining science and cross-cultural perspectives, Edward Wright's *Some Observations Made in Travelling through France [and] Italy* (1730), Patrick Brydone's *A Tour through Sicily and Malta* (1773), and Thomas Watkins's *Travels through Switzerland, Italy [and] Sicily* (1792) were only some of the travel books which testified to their continuous commitment in the dissemination of scientific-ethnographic information and the construction of new travel itineraries.

Their final effort was to include the 'picturesque' beauties of Sicily in Britons' Italian tours. Most of them complained about the sharp contrast between the higher nobility and the Sicilian *banditti* (1773, I, p. 49), or the unique blend of religion and superstition, so typical of southern traditions (1773, I, p. 92), yet there continued to be space for Etna and its 'terrible' sights. Further evidence of the cultural *continuum* that the Royal Society

had created since the early Restoration times could be found in Thomas Watkins's *Travels*:

Aetna, or, as it is here called, Mon Gibello, [...] is perhaps the most pleasing, and the most terrible in the world. Indeed it entirely consists of these opposite extremes. Its summit is covered with frozen snow, its inside ever burning: in one part it is totally bare of vegetation, in another clothed with perpetual verdure: you may in the summer months descend from a climate as cold as that of Scandinava to one as sultry as the atmosphere of Guinea; and between these extremes are different gradations, in which every vegetable that the earth produces flourish. Happy land, if slavery and superstitions were not the lot of thine inhabitants! (1792, II, p. 6)

It was not by chance that the last two articles from the Kingdom of Naples appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* in 1786 and 1795: however technical and specialized, they confirmed that it was still possible to consider its most remote lands as icons of the new aesthetic ideals. On the eve of Romanticism, a new phase in the English history of travel, probably the most adventurous and challenging one, was about to start.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anon. (1665-1666b). «An Account of the Tryalls, made in Italy of Campani's new Optick Glasses». *Philosophical Transactions*, 1, pp. 131-132.
- Anon. (1667). *A brief account of the Grammar Lecture, in Kings-Head Court near The Theater Royal Drury-Lane; Where Children are with great ease and speed perfectly taught the Latine Tongue...* London.
- Anon. (1669a). *Mount Aetna's Flames: Or, The Sicilian Wonder*. London.
- Anon. (1669b). *The Volcano's: Or, Burning and Fire-vomiting Mountains, Famous in the World: VVith their Remarkables. Collected for the most part out of Kircher's Subterraneous World; And expos'd to more general view in English, upon a Relation of the late Wonderful and Prodigious Eruptions of Etna...* London.
- Anon. (1669c). «An Answer to some Inquiries Concerning the Eruptions of Mount Aetna, An. 1669. Communicated by some Inquisitive English Merchants, now Residing in Sicily». *Philosophical Transactions*, 4, pp. 1028-1034.
- Anon. (1669d). «A Particular Accompt of Divers Minerals, Cast up and Burned by the Late Fire of Mount Aetna; Mentioning the several Specimina, from some Ingenious Marchants of England, Being upon the

- Place, and since Come to the Hands of the Publisher, for the Repository of the R. Society». *Philosophical Transactions*, 4, pp. 1041-1043.
- Anon. (1673a). *Room for News, or News from Rome, Being a Dialogue between the Pope and the Devil at a Late Conference*. London.
- Anon. (1673b). *The Character of a Papist*. London.
- Anon. (1675). «Some Communications from Rome and Paris». *Philosophical Transactions*, 10, p. 309.
- Anon. (1685). «An Explanation of the Figures of Several Antiquities, Communicated by a Member of the Royal Society». *Philosophical Transactions*, 15, pp. 1201-1202.
- Anon. (1686-1692). «An Extract of a Letter Written from Rome, Dated the 16th of November Last, to Signor Sarotti, Concerning a Discovery Made upon the Inundation of the Tevere. Translated out of the Italian». *Philosophical Transactions*, 16, p. 227.
- Anon. (1688). *A True and Exact Relation of the Most Dreadful Earthquake which happened in the City of Naples and Several Parts of the Kingdom, June the 5th, 1688... Translated from the Italian Copy, printed at Naples, by an Eye-witness of those Miserable Ruins*. London.
- Anon. (1693). *An Account of the Late Terrible Earthquake in Sicily; With most of its Particulars. Done from the Italian Copy Printed at Rome*. London.
- Anon. (1694). *The Earthquake*. Naples.
- Acton, William (1691). *A New Journal of Italy, Containing what is Most Remarkable of the Antiquities of Rome, Savoy, and Naples. With Observations... By William Acton*. London.
- Ariosto, Ludovico (1607). *Orlando furioso in English Heroical Verse, by Sir John Harington of Bathe Knight*. London.
- Boccone, Paolo Silvio (1673). «An Account of some of the Natural Things, with which the Intelligent and Inquisitive Signor Paulo Boccone, of Sicily, hath Lately Presented the Royal Society, and Enriched Their Repository». *Philosophical Transactions*, 8, pp. 6158-6161.
- Boccone, Paolo Silvio (1684). *Osservazioni naturali: ove si contengono materie medico-fisiche, e di botanica, produzioni naturali, fuochi sotterranei, et alter curiosità*. Bologna.
- Boccone, Paolo Silvio (1697). *Museo di fisica e di esperienza*. s.l.
- Bonaiuto, Vincenzo; Malpighi, Marcello (1694). «An Account of the Earthquakes in Sicilia, on the Ninth and Eleventh of January, 1692. Translated from an Italian Letter Wrote from Sicily by the Noble Vincentius Bonajutus, and Communicated to the ROYAL SOCIETY by the Learned Marcellus Malpighius, Physician to His Present Holiness». *Philosophical Transactions*, 18, pp. 2-10.
- Bonaiuto, Vincenzo (1697). «Intorno il terremoto della Sicilia seguito l'anno 1693». In: Paolo Boccone, *Museo di fisica e di esperienza*, pp. 17-22.

- Bromley, William (1693). *Remarks Made in Travels through France and Italy. With Many Publick Incriptions. Lately Taken by a Person of Quality*. London.
- Brydone, Patrick (1773). *A Tour through Sicily and Malta. In a series of Letters to William Beckford*. London.
- Burgos, Alessandro (1693). «An Extract of the Account Mentioned in the Foregoing Letter, Taken out of an Italian Paper. Written by P. Alessandro Burgos. Printed first at Palermo, and Afterwards at Naples». *Philosophical Transactions*, 17, pp. 830-838.
- Burton, William (1658). *A Commentary on Antoninus. His Itinerary, or Journies of the Roman Empire, so Far as it Concerneth Britain... By William Burton Bachelor of Lawes*. London.
- Ciampini, Giovanni (1685). «An Extract of a Letter from Senior Ciampini, to Dr. Croon, Concerning a Late Comet Seen at Rome». *Philosophical Transactions*, 15, pp. 920-921.
- Doni, Giovanni Battista (1670). «An Accompt Given by a Florentin Patrician, Call'd Jo. Battista Donius, Concerning a Way of Restoring the Salubrity of the Country about Rome: Extracted out of the Ninth Italian Giornale de' Letterati; and English'd as Follows». *Philosophical Transactions*, 5, pp. 2017-2019.
- Gabin, Antonio (1691). *Observations on a Journey to Naples. Wherein the Frauds of Romish Monks and Priests are farther Discover'd*. London.
- Guarino, Battista (1647). *Il pastor fido, the Faithfull Shepherd. A Pastorall. Written in Italian by Baptista Guarini, a Knight of Italy*. London.
- Hartop, Martin (1693). «A Letter from Mr. Martin Hartop at Naples, to the Publisher. Together with an Account of the late Earthquake in Sicily». *Philosophical Transactions*, 17, pp. 827-829.
- Lassels, Richard (1670). *The Voyage of Italy: Or, a Compleat Journey through Italy...* London.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò (1680). *The Works of the Famous Nicholas Machiavel, Citizen and Secretary of Florence. Written Originally in Italian and from Thence Newly and Faithfully Translated into English*. London.
- Malpighi, Marcello (1671). «An Extract of a Latin Letter, Written by the Learned Signior Malpighi to the Publisher, Concerning some Anatomical Observations, about the Structure of the Lungs of Froggs, Tortoises, &c. and perfecter Animals; as also the Texture of the Spleen, &c.» *Philosophical Transactions*, 6, pp. 2149-2150.
- Monro, John (1700-1701). «A Letter from Mr. John Monro to the Publisher, Concerning the Catacombs of Rome and Naples». *Philosophical Transactions*, 22, pp. 643-650.
- Robinson, Henry (1665-1666). «A Relation of the Raining of Ashes, in the Archipelago, upon the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius, some Years Ago». *Philosophical Transactions*, 1, p. 377.

- Sancroft, William (1654). *Modern Policies, Taken from Machiavel, Borgia, and Other Choice Authors. By an Eye Witnessse*. London.
- Tasso, Torquato (1660). *Aminta: The Famous Pastoral. Written in Italian by Signor Torquato Tasso. And Translated into English Verse by John Dancer...* London.
- Thoresby, Ralph (1698). «Part of a Letter from Mr. Ralph Thoresby, F.R.S. to Dr. Lister, Fellow of the Colledge of Physicians and R.S. concerning a Roman Shield». *Philosophical Transactions*, 20, pp. 205-208.
- Vernon, Francis (1676). «Mr. Vernon's Letter, Giving a Short Account of some of His Observations in His Travels from Venice Through Istria, Dalmatia, Greece, and the Archipelago, to Smyrna». *Philosophical Transactions*, 11, pp. 575-582.
- Vossius, Gerardus (1686-1692). «An Uncommon Inscription Lately Found on a Very Great Basis of a Pillar, Dug up at Rome; with an Interpretation of the Same by the Learned Dr. Vossius». *Philosophical Transactions*, 16, pp. 172-175.
- Watkins, Thomas (1794). *Travels Through Switzerland, Italy, Sicily, the Greek Islands to Constantinople...* London.
- Wright, Edward (1730). *Some Observations Made in Travelling Through France, Italy, &c. In the Years 1720, 1721, and 1722*. London.

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Christy (2007). *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ayres, Philip (1997). *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arienzo, Alessandro Petrina, Alessandra (eds.) (2013). *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England: Literary and Political Influences from the Reformation to the Restoration*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Black, Jeremy (2010). *The British and the Grand Tour* (Routledge Revivals). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Chaney, Edward (2014). *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Condorelli, Stephane (2011). *U tirrimotu ranni: Lectures du tremblement de terre de Sicile en 1693* [Thèse de doctorat]. Genève: Université de Genève.
- Delon, Michel, (ed.) (2013). *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Duffy, Cian (2013). *The Landscape of the Sublime 1700-1830: Classic Ground*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Eisner, Robert (1993). *Travelers to an Antique Land: The History and Literature of Travel to Greece*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Gascoigne, John (2002). *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, Religion, and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, Robert (2004). *Anglo-French Enemies since the Norman Conquest*. Exeter: Impress Books Limited.
- Haakonssen, Knud (ed.) (2006). *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayden, Judy A. (2012) *Travel Narratives, The New Science, and Literary Discourse*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hunter, Michael (1994). *The Royal Society and its Fellows 1660-1700. The Morphology of an Early Scientific Institution*. Oxford: The Alden Press.
- Korshin, Paul J. (2014). *Typologies in England, 1650-1820*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kronick, David (1991). *Scientific and Technical Periodicals in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Guide*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.
- Levy Peck, Linda (2005). *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDougall-Waters, Julie Moxham, Noah Fyfe, Allen (2014). «*Philosophical Transactions*»: 350 years of Publishing at the Royal Society (1665-2015). London: The Royal Society.
- Newman, Richard, Cranstone, David (2001). *The Historical Archaeology of Britain: c. 1540-1900*. Reading: Sutton.
- Ouditt, Sharon (2014). *Impressions of Southern Italy: British Travel Writing From Henry Swinburne to Norman Douglas*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Scott Fox, David (2013). *Mediterranean Heritage* (Routledge Revivals). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Smuts, Malcom R. (2010). *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rudwick, Martin J.S. (2007), *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Steadman, Gesa (2013). *Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century France and England*. Farmham: Ashgate.
- Sweet, Rosemary (2012). *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, ca. 1690-1820*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.