

Forlin Paolo, Department of Archaeology, Durham University (UK), *Coping with pandemics and seismic disasters in the Middle Ages: the Friuli and Carinthia earthquake of 1348*

Abstract:

The eastern Alps were affected by a destructive earthquake in January 1348, that is to say immediately before the outbreak of the Black Death in that region. This seismic event represents one of the most severe earthquakes occurred in Europe in the last millennium, with an estimate magnitude of about $M=7$. The 1348 earthquake caused widespread destruction in the area of Villach (Austria), northern Friuli (Italy) and western Slovenia, triggering devastating landslides and lake tsunamis. In the aftermath of the event, the societies affected had to cope simultaneously with the destruction caused by the earthquake and the impact of the pandemic, which is thought to have killed about one third of the population in these areas.

My paper will provide an overview on the state-of-the-art of the seismic disaster, stressing some aspects relating the perception and interpretation of the events and discussing some controversial issues introduced by the exclusive use of written records and the lack of archaeological research. Drawing on some case studies addressed by the ArMedEa (Archaeology of Medieval Earthquakes) and the RiskRes (Risk and Resilience, Exploring responses to historic earthquakes) projects in Carnia and from Aquileia (Friuli, Italy), I will also discuss the potential of the archeological and architectural information in the understanding of the impact of and reactions to the 1348 earthquake. I will therefore reflect on the collected data in view of a better understanding of the seismic event from a palaeoseismological perspective.