

Report on the Geoevent “DISCOVERING VOLCANOES”, sponsored by AIQUA, at the Vesuvius Observatory Museum (INGV)

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ABSTRACT: A brief summary of the activities carried out on 20th October 2012 at the Vesuvius Observatory Museum for the Geoevent of Planet Earth Week, “Discovering Volcanoes”, sponsored by AIQUA.

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On October 20th 2012, the Planet Earth Week Geoevent “Discovering Volcanoes”, an event organized under the patronage of the Italian Association for Quaternary Research (AIQUA), the Vesuvius Observatory Museum (MOVE, Fig. 1) played host during an interesting day devoted to instruction about volcanic phenomena.

This occasion for awareness-raising was given an enthusiastic reception by members of the public thanks to the communication skills of numerous researchers who were able to combine science, history and art so as to convey important information regarding volcanic hazards, using as a base extraordinary records from the past, some of which are unpublished.

In the Vesuvius Observatory Museum’s prestigious Luigi Palmieri Room (Fig. 2), several films of Vesuvius eruptions were shown, beginning with a short footage from 1898 made by the Lumière brothers two years after their invention of the moving picture camera. The two brothers visited Naples that year to film scenes of daily life and city landmarks. In the background of their shots of the dock, Vesuvius in eruption may be seen. The Lumière brothers thus filmed a volcanic eruption for the first time ever, illustrating the activity of Vesuvius which in the four years from 1895 had formed Colle Umberto, a lava dome named after the king of Italy, Umberto I.



Fig. 1 - The historic seat of the Vesuvius Observatory, first home of the oldest volcanological observatory in the world.



Fig. 2 - Moments during the event in the Palmieri Room of the prestigious seat of the Vesuvius Observatory in Ercolano.



Fig. 3 - The collection of lava medals on display for the occasion in the room that housed the Volcano Exhibition: Multimedia Voyage into the World of Volcanoes.

Another footage of great interest and scientific value was that of the 1906 eruption, Vesuvius' largest of the 20th century. The seven-minute-long film was made by two Neapolitan photographers, the Troncone brothers, who sent it to a cinema exhibition in Paris, where the spool was lost. A copy of the footage turned up as part of a popular film about volcanoes and earthquakes produced in America in the 1920s – today part of the patrimony of the Vesuvius Observatory Museum. The recovery of this film was of great importance, since apart from the unique 1906 shots, it also contains footage taken immediately after the 1908 Messina earthquake by a sailor on the Russian battleship Makarov, which intervened to give aid to the populace. The last film screened, in full, was that of the 1944 eruption made by the Allied Forces during the Second World War and donated to the director at the time, Giuseppe Imbò.

More than 300 members of the public took part in the Geoevent, showing a keen interest in and appreciation of the initiative, and afterwards participated in the visit to the Museum, where expert guides led those present on an extraordinary journey through the world of Italian volcanoes and the geothermal energy that can be obtained from them.

By means of panels and exhibits on Italian volcanoes and geothermal energy, audiovisuals, a multimedia panel and a 3D-movie room, visitors were given information about Italy's active volcanoes and the danger they pose, and the systems adopted by the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) for monitoring their activities.

The visit also permitted an appreciation of what may be considered the Vesuvius Observatory Museum's treasures, the precious assemblage of rocks, volcanic ash and lava medallions housed in the old Bourbon building, and in particular the collections of meteorological and seismological instruments, from the oldest electrometers and seismoscopes to the world's first electromagnetic seismograph, built by Palmieri in 1856, up to more modern versions. The Museum also recounts the progress of volcanology and seismology, which owed their birth and much of their development to past directors of the Vesuvius Observatory, starting with Macedonio Melloni, Luigi Palmieri, Giuseppe Mercalli and Alessandro Malladra.

Particular interest was aroused by the collection of medallions in Vesuvian lava, the only one of its kind, which bears witness to moments in the social, political and scientific world that surrounded the volcano; they were stamped onto still-fluid lavas (Fig. 3) that erupted from Vesuvius between 1819 and 1944.

The event also provoked considerable interest in the national and international press, which released pictures of the day's highlights in Italy and numerous other countries.

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