



Image: Athanasius Kircher, Mount Etna, 1637. / Wikimedia Commons



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Borelli and the 1669 Eruption of Etna

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This paper deals with Borelli's tract on the 1669 Etna eruption, which spurred an interest of natural philosophers and learned societies in geothermic phenomena. Borelli, who was professor at the University of Messina, wrote a thorough study of the eruption. The book originated from his correspondence with the Royal Society and with Leopoldo de' Medici. On May 18 1669 Oldenburg wrote to Borelli asking for information about the Etna eruption. After receiving Oldenburg's letter, Borelli was contacted by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, who was eager to get information about the eruption. Borelli did not fail to please his former patron so he sent Leopoldo a drawing of the fire in Catania, a good deal of information about the eruption, and some specimens of volcanic rocks and minerals, including details about the ejected material. The account Borelli sent to Leopoldo was a draft of the one he wrote for the Royal Society. In the event, Borelli's report turned into a book, bearing the title of *Historia et meteorologia incendii Aetnaei anni 1669*, printed in Reggio Calabria in 1670. Borelli's tract on Etna contains a study of the topography of Etna and a history of previous eruptions as well as pictures of the Etna. In addition, Borelli explored the causes of subterranean fires and of eruptions and produced chemical and mechanical explanations of geothermic phenomena.



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