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THE LISBON EARTHQUAKE IN 1755: THE
FIRST MODERN DISASTER*

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INTRODUCTION

The timing of the Lisbon earthquake made it a topic of discussion and disputation among intellectuals involved in what has come to be known as the Enlightenment. In part, it challenged growing liberal views about the miracles and wonder of nature itself. And it seemed to reaffirm the presence of God that many were trying to make abstract, distant and benign. The interest here, however, is that the earthquake on November 1, 1755 can be considered the first “modern” disaster because it was first to evoke a coordinated state emergency response as well as a forward looking comprehensive effort for reconstruction which included mitigation efforts to reduce future disaster efforts.

Major earthquakes were not new. There had been a major earthquake in Port Royal, Jamaica in 1693 and in Catania, Sicily and in Naples in 1693. But most of Northern Europe was seismically stable and for most Europeans, earthquakes occurred elsewhere. Lisbon was not the first to evoke governmental interest. At times, European governments have been involved in the process of reconstructing colonial towns and villages destroyed by earthquakes.¹ But when the Lisbon earthquake occurred, it became the focus of attention for the “relevant civilized world”.²

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE LISBON EARTHQUAKE

The Lisbon earthquake occurred in the context of Portugal’s effort to “modernize” and to catch up with the progress neighboring nations had already achieved. As a capital city, it was crucial to the development process. As the residence of the King, it was the location of nobility that could enhance or impede the development process. As a port city, Lisbon was central to trade with the colonies, notably Brazil, which was central to

¹ See, for example, S. Tobriner, The Genesis of Nato: An Eighteenth-Century City (London 1982)

² T.D. Kendrick, The Lisbon Earthquake (London 1956) p.25

the future economic fortunes of the country. In effect, the earthquake provided a serious threat to the continuity of the state and its chance to enhance its position in the global economy.

Woloch has suggest that the 18h century in Europe was characterized by a multiplicity of states linked together in a pattern of rivalry and mutual recognition³ and that their rulers sought to promote their sovereignty by amassing power over policy and resources within the state and by competing with other states for influence and territory. Most European countries were undergoing rather dramatic transformation during the 18th century. At the time of the Lisbon earthquake, George II ruled in England; Louis XV in France; Maria Theresa's in Austria; Frederick II in Prussia; and Elizabeth in Russia. By those comparisons, Portugal was considered a backwater and irrelevant country ruled by ineptness and indifference. In the first part of the 18th century, Portugal was ruled by John V, 1705-50. He spent most of his reign building monuments and palaces, funded by gold from Brazil. Much of his wealth was distributed by gestures of largess and prestige, but wealth made him independent of the court, which he rarely assembled. In 1742, his illness caused the affairs of state to fall increasingly in the hands of churchmen. The major governmental positions were filled by cardinals or priests and the King's confidential advisor was a Jesuit. In 1750, Portugal, with a population of less than 3 million people, had an army of clergy, perhaps number 200,000. Charles Boxer called 18th century Portugal " more priest ridden than any other country in the world, with the possible exception of Tibet." ⁴ At mid-century, Portugal's colonial operations in Brazil and Paraguay were being undercut by Jesuit control and independent merchants. The

³ I. Woloch, Eighteen-Century Europe: Tradition and Progress, New York, W.W. Norton and Co.

⁴ C.R. Boxer, The Portuguese Seaborne Empire: 1415-1825 (Oxford 1963) p.189

British Factory (an association of British merchants with favorable trade agreements) had a major grip on port commerce and on Brazilian gold. Aside from the long term conflictual alliance with British commercial interests, Portugal was not on good terms with France. It was traditionally suspicious of Spain and was not necessarily responsive to Vatican directives.

At the time, Lisbon was perhaps the fourth largest city in Europe, after London, Paris and Naples, with a population of 275,000. It was famous for its wealth. It was full of palaces and churches and, because of commercial activity, it was one of the best known cities in the world since traders, particularly English and German, did most of the business in town. But Lisbon was also known as a city of the Inquisition and was characterized as being a center of superstition and idolatry.

The key to understanding Portugal in the last half of the 18th century and the key to understanding the meaning of the earthquake centers on the career of Sebastiao Jose de Carvalho e Melo⁵. In later 1770, he was made Marques de Pombal and historically that name is usually associated with him. Pombal was given the responsibility for the emergency response and reconstruction of Lisbon after the earthquake but this was only one part of his overall effort to “modernize” Portugal. From 1739-1743, which was a period of expansion and imperialism in England, he represented the Portuguese King in the Court of St. James. In that capacity he came to distrust British ideas about expansion in South America, where Portuguese interests were critical. Too he was offended at what he perceived to be British indifference to Anglo-Portuguese affairs, which were central to Portugal’s economic and social future. From 1745 to 1750, he was posted to Austria to

⁵ Major source on the career of Pombal is K. Maxwell, Pombal:Paradox of the Enlightenment, (Cambridge 1995) and on the reign of Jose I is H.V, Livermore, A New History of Portugal (Cambridge 1976)

Maria Theresa's court. He was irritated by the shift from London since he felt that this was intended to keep him away from economic and commercial issues, perhaps as a deliberate move by his "enemies" in the court. In addition, during that time he was able to observe Maria Theresa's attempt to reform the censorship system in Austria and to wrest the University of Vienna from Jesuit control.

During his various experiences, Pombal sought to understand the economic and political weakness of Portugal. He was particularly concerned about how a small country could maintain economic viability, especially in an international system composed of larger and aggressive states such as Britain. He was interested in how the state might guarantee its economic interests. He was also distrustful of the Jesuits and many of the aristocracy. The Jesuits had set up their own economic empires in South America with the rationale of having missions to protect and Indians to Christianize. The Jesuits also had a monopoly on higher education in Portugal, which trained the aristocracy and rejected many new ideas, including scientific ones, through control and censorship. Also with his experience outside the country, Pombal had met many people who had been exiled by their opposition to the Inquisition, whose talents had been lost to Portugal, but whose skills could be important in revitalizing their economic fortunes. He, thus, regarded Jesuits as a particular threat to Portugal's economic future and their close ties to the aristocracy and to the King made them especially dangerous.

Pombal's experience outside the country came to an end when John V died in 1750 and he was followed by his son, Jose I, then 36. Jose's main interests were not of the state but in riding, playing cards, attending the theater and opera and in devotions. Three days after John died, Pombal was appointed a minister and, three days later, was

appointed to head the Department of Foreign Affairs and War. With Jose's interest in personal matters, this gave Pombal, in time, almost complete power over the direction of this responsibility. the King spent most of his days at his country estate in Belem and returned to confer with his ministers in the evening. Whether such conferences actually occurred is perhaps moot, but Pombal was able to gain and utilize his power in the name of the King until 1777. In his activities, Pombal was aided by others, including family members. Two of his brothers were close collaborators in his administration. Paulo de Carvalho, a priest, was elevated by Pope Clement XIV. He became Inquisitor General and president of the municipal council of Lisbon, a position to which Pombal appointed his son, Henrique, when his brother died. Another brother, Francisco Xavier Mendonca Futado served as governor and captain general of the Brazilian provinces of Grao Para and Maranhao, an area which then covered the entire Amazon Valley. Later, he worked closely with Pombal as Secretary of State for overseas dominion. The involvement of family members was, of course, not unique to Portugal, but it provided a significant clue to Pombal's aspirations for his country and the direction of efforts to reform the country. for example, an expatriate friend, Duke Silva-Tarouca, whom Pombal had known in Vienna, recalled their conversations there and, on hearing of his appointment as minister, recommended to Pombal that "when new dispositions are necessary, they should always be put forward by ancient names and in ancient clothing" In effect, he was characterizing Pombal's future direction – "a policy of reform disguised, when necessary, by traditional institutions and language".⁶ The stance of using tradition has often been misunderstood by subsequent historians who have generally excluded Pombal from discussions of the Enlightenment or have characterized him as a "despot", without any limiting adjectives.

⁶ Maxwell, p.9

Maxwell, however, in his biography of Pombal, more accurately titled his book “paradox of the Enlightenment”.

THE INITIAL ACTIONS OF POMBAL AS MINISTER

Pombal, in his new position of responsibility, initiated a number of actions intended to strengthen the nation’s control of its colonial empire and its domestic economy. When he came into office, there was ambiguity over boundaries in their holdings in South America. In the Treaty of Madrid, (1750) Portugal agreed to relinquish control of Colonia do Sacramento and the land north on the La Plata in exchange for Spanish recognition of their river transportation system. The acceptance of the boundaries placed the Jesuit’s Seven Missions and their pasture land, long a part of Spanish control, under Portuguese rule. This would require the relocation of the Jesuits and their Indian converts. Under the terms of the treaty, some 30,000 Indians would be expected to relocate. The Indians chose to resist, and it was not until 1756 when a joint Spanish-Portuguese military force invaded the territory of the Seven Missions that their resistance was ended. This experience reinforced Pombal’s distrust of the Jesuits whom he blamed for the resistance.

Pombal’s efforts in South America were assisted by his brother, Francisco Xavier de Mendonca Funtado. He had been a member of the Luso-Spanish boundary commission which had decided that the Jesuits must move some of their missions to conform to the new boundaries. Pombal later appointed his brother of Para and Maranhao in northern Brazil to enforce the implementation of a form of state capitalism, the Grao-Para Company. This company was intended to monopolize the trade of Brazil. This company was not greeted with enthusiasm by Portuguese merchants already trading

in Brazil, nor was it seen positively by the Jesuits and British merchants. (Pombal also banned independent small merchants who often sold goods to the British.) Objections to these changes were met by rather immediate sanctions. A sermon preached in the Patriarchal church there criticized Pombal's action. Such criticism now could be labeled as treasonous since the changes were new royal laws. The preacher was banished; three merchants involved in the Brazil trade were exiled to Africa and four Jesuits, who arrived in Lisbon soon after the earthquake, were expelled.

Pombal's acquisition of power also provoked many of the aristocracy to oppose him. Traditionally, the nobility expected that they would be appointed as ambassadors or governors and be given other responsibilities in the royal court. However, Pombal often appointed his family members and friends and publicly suggested that titles should be a reward for service, not lineage. By 1777, Pombal had retired 23 titles and created 23, usually to reward merit. By the end of his tenure, one third of the nobility had been changed.⁷ Pombal also tried to minimize status differences. As was the practice in other European countries, he allowed merchants to wear swords, which beforehand had been an obvious mark of nobility. On occasion, when state companies were formed, he would appoint some noblemen to boards of directors with the stated hope that they might learn some relevant commercial skills. While the nobility in Portugal was relatively small compared to other neighboring countries, they often were at the center of activities to undercut the King or to cultivate his possible successor.

Opposition to Pombal's actions, then, came principally from the Jesuits, whose international viewpoint clashed directly with Pombal's nationalism, from merchants who previously had advantages in colonial trade and from the aristocracy, which was

⁷ Maxwell, p.78

distrustful of Pombal's increased power, especially the segment which styled themselves as "puritanos" – that is, those whose blood was not "tainted" by Jewish or Moorish ancestry. Opposition and particularly collaboration among his enemies were sure to evoke action on the part of Pombal. Those "enemies" continued to bedevil Pombal when he had to assume the responsibility for the response and reconstruction of the earthquake.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake occurred at 9:40 am on November 1st when many of the residents were at mass. That initiated the first of a series of problems in Lisbon. Sometime later, as a port city, there was also a tsunami which created additional victims and new damage. There was also major fire which, by some accounts lasted five to six days, destroyed many buildings not damaged by the earthquake. And Lisbon was plagued by aftershocks, over 500 in the next nine months.

Estimates of those who lost their lives, varied tremendously, Franca cites ten estimates, the lower 10,000 and highest 90,000 and settles on 10,000, 4% of the population.⁸ The deaths cut across social categories. Certainly several hundred priests and nuns were killed and some 20 or 30 of the 40 parish churches were damaged. As Kendrick noted, many died "unconfessed and unforgiven".⁹ Since the major impacts were in the center of the city which contained significant art works and libraries. Being an international city, foreign victims often focused widespread attention. The deaths of the Spanish ambassador, the Head of the English Seminary and the great grandson of the French dramatist, Racine, provided concern in other European countries. Seventy seven members of the English factory, most of them women, were among the casualties.

⁸ J.A. Franca, Lisbon Pombalina e o Iluminismo, (Lisbon 1983)

⁹ Kendrick, p.26

The number of houses damaged was considerable. Some estimates suggest that perhaps only 3,000 out of 20,000 dwellings were livable. Most certain was the damage to landmark public buildings. The Royal Palace was destroyed, but the King and his entourage had been at Belem, outside town, where the earthquake caused minimal damage. The Royal Opera House, finished the month before, was destroyed. The Royal Mint, Arsenal, and Custom House were gone. The church of the Inquisition and the church of the Patriarch were damaged. Some of the facilities for the busy port no longer existed and many merchants, including those from foreign companies, suffered significant losses. It was estimated that of the 48 million Spanish dollars losses, 32 million was the British share and perhaps 8 million were losses by Hamburg merchants. Obviously, the extent of the destruction of resources in Lisbon was a severe blow to Pombal's aspirations for Portugal's economic renewal and for new political directions.

The young King whose behavior had already evidenced a disinterest in affairs of the state is supposed to have asked "What should we do?" And Pombal is supposed to have answered "Bury the dead and feed the living."¹⁰ That exchange, perhaps apocryphal, indicated a more significant shift in political responsibility. The principal minister was old and ill and the minister with Pombal's previous responsibility could not be found. The King gave Pombal total responsibility for dealing with the emergency response and later for the reconstruction. A few months later when the principal minister died, Pombal assumed his position and the King further retreated into his personal concerns. In effect, Pombal ruled Portugal until 1777 when the King died.

¹⁰ Kendrick, p. 48

THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Pombal's assumption of the emergency responsibility led to a series of rather decisive actions which could provide a model for subsequent disasters, including some modern ones. Pombal's initial action was to ask the Chief Justice to appoint 12 district leaders with overarching emergency powers. The first and most immediate task was a disposal of bodies, since there was considerable fear of the outbreak of plague. The day after the earthquake, Pombal suggested to the Patriarch (The head of the church in Portugal) that the best way to dispose of the bodies was to collect them on barges and then out in the Tagus to be weighted down and sunk. The Patriarch agreed and instructed the religious involved to collection of the bodies of this decision. This meant that traditional religious rites associated with death were disregarded. There were a number of emergency measures instituted to insure a continuing food supply. The military provided transportation for produce from the outside and the price of food was controlled. Fishing was encouraged. Some traditional taxes on fish were suspended, if the fish were sold within the impacted area. Ships which were in port at the time were not allowed to leave, until it was determined that their contents could not be used in the emergency.

Housing of course, was at a premium. The King and his family lived in tents in Belem, outside the city for nine months until a wooden palace was finished. Pombal, although his place was undamaged, also lived in a hut in Belem. At the end of November, plans for a massive reconstruction were beginning to take shape. A survey was planned; land rents were controlled and laws passed which did not allow landlords to evict tenants. The debris was sorted to salvage materials which would be used in the

reconstruction. Initial profiting in wood was controlled and supplies were sequestered. Unauthorized building which did not conform to the planned construction was stopped.

Security became an issue. It is reported that gallows were set up in several parts of the city as a warning against looting. It was also noted that at least 34 were executed for looting, but as usual, it was claimed that most of them were “foreigners”. Too, early in 1756, the Patriarch announced that excommunication would be the sanction for those posing a priests or nuns in order to get special advantages. It was feared that many persons would leave the city so those in charge of outlying provinces were instructed to send refugees back to the city. A pass system was set up to regulate entrance and exit from the city. There was, as might be expected, a concerted effort to maintain normalcy. The weekly newspaper, published just before the earthquake, kept on schedule.

ON DELAYED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE EARTHQUAKE

Obviously the responsibilities for emergency response and for reconstruction interrupted Pombal’s attempt to make Portugal economically viable and politically strong. In particular, he was concerned how the earthquake would be interpreted by others. The day after the earthquake, when he asked the Patriarch for permission to initiate mass burials, he also asked him to stop “alarmist” sermons which were suggesting that the earthquake was a form of divine retribution for the “sins” of Portugal. He was also concerned that the call for devotional repentance might lead to personal withdrawal at a time when the city needed everyone for the tasks remaining. In the succeeding months, he was continually concerned with prediction of future earthquakes as continued punishment. A spate of new predictions came as the first anniversary approached. There were no indications that Pombal was not supportive of the impressive actions of most

clergy during the response. Much of the temporary housing and the provision of food became the responsibility of the Church and churches became the center of temporary facilities for those displaced. That suggests Pombal saw danger only in the religious practices and interpretations which might inhibit or delay the reconstruction process.

There were several opportunities in the aftermath to further the economic viability of Portugal. Warships were sent to Brazil, India and Africa to indicate to those lands that trade with Portugal was still secure. Troops were sent to the Algarve to prevent African pirates from taking advantage of trade opportunities during the preoccupation with reconstruction. While taxes were temporarily suspended, a four percent “donation” was levied on all imports. Members of the British Factory objected to that “tax” on the basis that previous treaties would exempt them, but the tax held. Even with these economic concerns, Pombal used the earthquake to further his conflict with Jesuits and the aristocracy.

THE ROLE OF MALAGRIDA

One person who tended to personify all that Pombal had come to dislike was Gabriel Malagrida. Born in Italy in 1689, he had gone as a Jesuit missionary to Brazil in 1721 where he became famous for his fervent sermons and stories that he told about his adventures with Indians. There he had restored decaying churches and established convents. His fame as a prophet preceded him when he came to Portugal in 1749. His reputation and his knowledge of the colonies allowed him access to the palace where he became confessor to King John. Malagrida’s reputation grew when it was reported the King died in his arms and he informed the Queen that he would also act as her confessor, when her time came. Malagrida returned to Brazil in 1749, traveling on the same boat

with Pombal's brother who was going to assume his administrative duties, but in 1753 he returned from Portugal and attached himself to the Queen Mother. But his influence now evoked suspicion and when she fell ill, he was forbidden entrance to her apartments. Returning to his house in Setubal on August 14, 1754, while preaching a sermon, he interrupted it to announce the death of the Queen. With that prediction verified, his reputation as a prophet was enhanced. Many of those who encouraged him were members of the court who opposed Pombal. Malagrida specialized in holding retreats, which he suggested was necessary for everyone. He espoused hopes of building a permanent retreat house in Lisbon.

In the fall of 1756, Malagrida published Juizo da verdadeira causa do toremoto (an opinion On the True Cause of the Earthquake) which was a summary of the sermons he had been preaching for the last year suggesting it was scandalous to pretend that the earthquake was a natural event. Approaching the first anniversary of the earthquake he insisted the people of Lisbon had continued on their sinful ways including their love for theater, music, dance, and bull fighting and that their efforts to repent were shortsighted. They were advised by Malagrida that by going to a retreat at a Jesuit house for six days they could be properly instructed about making peace with God. The pamphlet structured the debate in rather start terms.

Malagrida said: "Learn, O Lisbon, that the destroyers of our houses, palaces, churches, and convents, the cause of the death of so many people and the flames that devoured such vast treasures, are your abominable sins, and not comets, stars, vapors and

exhalations, and similar natural phenomena”.¹¹

That argument undermined the work of the parish priests and those of other orders whose had provided significant service during the emergency response. Malagrida sent copies of his sermon to Pombal and to members of the Royal Family. He continued his retreats at Setubal, exhorting those who attended with his view on the “causes” of the earthquake.

Malagrida presented a particular problem for Pombal. For the state to act against a Jesuit, Pombal would need a papal dispensation. But for religious orders, turning someone over to state authorities usually was interpreted as an indication of guilt. The route of administrative sanction was too risky for Pombal and he acted with considerable indirection. In May, 1757, he ordered the secularization of civil powers in Para, extinguishing the missions and declaring the Indians free. Jesuits were limited to duties of parish priests. Then when the priests removed sacred images from the churches, they were informed that they were now state property. There was also the charge that the Jesuits were armed. But they claimed their small cannons were only ceremonial. In September, in Lisbon when the royal confessor had been sufficiently alarmed about this tension in the colonies between the state and the Jesuits, he found his access to the King blocked. Then the royal confessor and other Jesuits in the palace were ejected and forbidden to return without the King’s permission. Their previous duties were reallocated to members of other orders – Franciscans, Augustinians and Carmelites. Later Pombal sent his cousin to seek a secret audience with the Pope to push for reform of the Jesuits on the grounds that they attempted to usurp the power of the Sovereign and that they had an insatiable desire for wealth. In early 1758, Pombal wrote a widely translated tract accusing the Jesuits of attempting to create their own state. And in April,

¹¹ Kendrick, p. 89

the Pope (Benedict XIV) authorized the Cardinal-Patriarch to reform the Society in Portugal. In May, the Cardinal prohibited the Jesuits from engaging in illegal commerce and, in June, Jesuits were forbidden to preach or hear confessions and their superior was banned from Lisbon. Malagrida appealed to the new Pope, Clement XIII, in the following words;

“What a fatal scene. What a grievous spectacle! What a sudden metamorphosis! The heralds of the word of God expelled from the Missions, proscribed and condemned to ignominy. ...and who does this? Not his most Faithful Majesty, ...but the minister Carvalho, whose will is supreme at court. He, yes, he, has been the architect of so many disasters and seeks to darken the splendor of our Society, which dazzles his livid eyes, with a flood of bigoted writings that breathe an immense, virulent, implacable hatred. If he could behead all the Jesuits at one blow, with what pleasure would he do so?”¹²

In September of that year, Pombal took advantage of an incident to further weaken his traditional enemies. The King was returning to Belem late in the evening after an amorous adventure when he was ambushed and shot several times. Although rumors were circulated that he had been ambushed by some of the nobility, nothing was done for over three months. In December, a Royal decree was issued to create a special court to investigate the attempt. It waived customary legal protection and allowed the court to sentence and execute the guilty on the same day. It also accused certain persons of prophesying the King's death and of conspiring to bring it about. Troops were sent to arrest six titled persons, their families, and servants. Malagrida and twelve other Jesuits

¹² Livermore, p. 227-228

were arrested and all of the Jesuit colleges were surrounded by troops. The two major conspirators were the Duke of Aveiro who the highest ranking noble after the Royal Family and the head of the supreme court and the Marques of Tavora had been a general and Viceroy of India.

A new voice in the political landscape was added when the Casa dos Vinte Quatro, an urban municipal council of the guilds expressed the desire of the “people” that the guilty should be punished, that the trial should be held in secret and that the King should be permitted to use torture in this circumstance. Later the Casa exhorted the King to “withdraw unwonted clemency”. On January 12, 1759, sentence was pronounced and executions held. On a scaffold in Belem, various guilty parties were beheaded, broken on a rack and burnt. The whole scaffold was then set alight and the ashes scattered in the Tagus River. When the ashes of both nobles and servants were mingled in their final resting place, this event received considerable attention over Europe since high ranking nobles had seldom been punished in this way. This episode reinforced the view of outsiders that Portugal as “backward”.

The ecclesiastical “suspects” still presented a problem. The priests were confined to their colleges. The Pope agreed that any priests involved in the assassination attempt could be tried in secular court, but hoped the King would not condemn the whole for a few. However, the Pope’s message was never delivered to Pombal. On September 3, 1759, the anniversary of the assassination, a royal edict was issued identifying the crimes of the Jesuits. It outlawed them from Portugal. Jesuits then in Portugal were sent to Rome and those in Brazil arrived in Rome by sea the following year. That is, all except Malagrida and others in prison. Malagrida was to be condemned as a heretic by the

Inquisition. Since the extant Inquisitor-General was not too keen to supervise this proceeding, Pombal's younger brother, Paulo de Carvalho, took his place. Pombal himself drew the first indictment in which Malagrida was charged with planning regicide from his house in Sebutal. In addition, he was charged with heresy for some of his writings, not, however, his discourse on the causes of the earthquake. He was found guilty on January 12, 1761, and was publicly executed on September 20th, slightly less than six years after the earthquake. The rather spectacular auto do fe lasted all day, two hours of which was devoted to reading his sentence. Malagrida was strangled and later his body was burned and his ashes thrown in the river.

THE RECONSTRUCTION

One of the first actions of Pombal took initially after the earthquake was to appoint several military engineers and surveyors to make inventories of property rights and claims and to assure that the sanitary and leveling operations were carried out safely and with dispatch. The engineers were also charged with drawing up plans for a new city. The waterfront area and the zone back from the river Tagus to Rossio Square were leveled and the rather steep western slopes were reduced. Streets were fixed at 60 feet in width – 50 feet for the roadway and 10 feet for sidewalks. Street crossings were set at right angles. To both speed up reconstruction and to encourage local enterprises, efforts were made to prefabricate and standardize materials which would be needed; ironworks, wood joints, tiles and ceramics. In addition, a wooden frame, called a gaiola, which had flexibility in the event of future earthquakes, was mandated for all construction and a standardized facade for the new buildings was required. These innovations were used later in the construction of new buildings at the University of Coimbra and in the

construction of a new town on the Algarve on the border with Spain. In the plans drawn for reconstruction, there was the decision to put a great square on the waterfront as the centerpiece of the plan. The new square, placed on the old Royal plaza was and still is called, the Praca do Comercio – the commerce square. That name reflects the direction that Pombal had for the future of Portugal.

The ongoing reconstruction of Lisbon was only one part of Pombal's transformation. Woloch has suggested that, in the 18th century, a ruler's success could be measured by developing a monopoly over coercion, taxation, administration and lawmaking.¹³ In the 1760s, Pombal was concerned with a series of "solutions" to continuing problems. In particular, there was the creation of a new system of public education to replace Jesuit education and a new curriculum more attuned to educating others than just nobility. There was the assertion of national authority in religious and church administration. There was strengthening of the state's taxing authority, military capabilities and security. In the 1760s, Pombal established the office of general supervisor of police and the court of the Kingdom. In all cases, the legislation necessary for these new measures was codified and systemized into law with the reasoning outlined and justified. Colonial policy continued to be given attention. Pombal's brother joined the cabinet as minister of overseas dominion and moved quickly to create a new commercial company to control the major centers of Brazilian commerce and production in the sugar-producing regions. In 1761, a royal treasury was established which was a key element in Pombal's effort of rationalization and centralization. Pombal appointed himself as Inspector General and the aim of the treasury was to centralize jurisdiction for all fiscal matters and to be responsible for different sectors, from customs houses to the

¹³ Woloch, p. 4

allocation of royal monopolies. This completed his reform of revenue collection. Finally, certain changes were made in the Inquisition. The Inquisition's police powers were given to the police in 1768 and its book censorship roles were assumed by a royal commission that year. In 1769, Pombal removed the Inquisition's power to act as an independent tribunal and all of the property confiscated by the Inquisition was transferred to the national treasury. Public auto da fe were eliminated as was the death penalty.

In June 1775, the reconstruction of Lisbon was far enough along to hold a dedication of the Praca, adorned with the equestrian statue of Jose I. For the three day celebration, the unfinished buildings around the square were filled in with wood and canvas to give the impression of what the final effect would be. Several days after the celebration, Pombal sent Jose a series of reflections in which he described their "joint" accomplishments. These included improvements in literacy, industry, culture and Pombal indicated that the square indicated prosperity – that "observant foreigners did not fail to remark about the millions spent in public and private buildings after the earthquake. They saw a most magnificent square surpassing all others in Europe."¹⁴

In 1776, Jose fell ill and died February 24, 1777. The next day, when Pombal arrived at the palace, Cardinal de Cunha met him and told him "Your Excellency no longer has anything here to do."¹⁵ Twenty years before, as an archbishop, de Cunha had issued a pastoral letter against the Jesuits at Pombal's request. But, with Jose's death, the opposition that Pombal had face during his tenure coalesced quickly and with certain vengeance. Pombal spent the rest of his life defending himself and his past accomplishments against charges of abuses of power. In 1781, Don Marie I intervened in

¹⁴ Livermore, p.237-238

¹⁵ Livermore, p. 238

the persistent attacks and declared that Pombal deserved of “exemplary punishment” but because of his age and feeble condition, no formal proceedings would be initiated.

Pombal died the following year. In one sense, his enemies finally won but most of the changes he had made prepared the transition which was necessary for Portugal to move toward a modern state. Maxwell concludes that “The story of Pombal’s administration is, therefore, an important antidote to the overly linear and progressive view of the role of the eighteenth-century enlightenment in Europe and the relationship between the Enlightenment and the exercise of state power”.¹⁶

FINAL COMMENTS

The Lisbon earthquake can be called the first modern disaster. The earthquake happened in the context of the development of a more centralized and “modern” state of Portugal. No other European state going through the state building process had to deal with the major destruction in their capital city. But Portugal has never been considered a useful case study in discussion of state building in the 18th century. Key figures in the 18th century, of interest to later historians were those whose actions seemed to strengthen liberty rather than those who used power. In that context, Pombal is usually identified with abuses of power rather than for his accomplishments in organizing the first modern governmental response and reconstruction as well as his insistence in defining the earthquake as a “natural” event. That suggests, however, that a “natural” explanation of disaster is closely tied to the state building process.

In his monumental work on the “civilizing” process, Norbert Elias focuses on generalized causes of the state building.¹⁷ In particular, he traces the struggles among the

¹⁶ Maxwell, p. 161

¹⁷ N. Elias, Power and Civility: The Civilizing Process, Vol. II, (New York, 1982)

nobility, the Church and the Princes and later the emergence of the bourgeois. In that struggle, Elias says, there is a gradual accumulation of land, then money, in fewer and fewer hands. This tends toward a monopoly, which he labels the “royal mechanism”. In this process, what was previously the private power of individuals gradually becomes public or state power until one social unit, the state, is able to control more and more opportunities. The process is enhanced by gaining control of both physical violence and taxation. The development of centralization and monopolization means that what was previously done by military or economic force would now become amenable to planning by the state.

One cannot infer that Pombal substituted a naturalistic interpretation of the earthquake since, at the time, now well differentiated “scientific” theory existed. It is possible that Pombal might have been familiar with Thomas Burnet’s The Sacred Theory of the Earth which argued that, since God operated through natural processes, the Biblical flood could be explained in scientific terms.¹⁸ Burnet’s theory also had an explanation for earthquakes and his theory was being widely discussed in England and Pombal was there, and it was also a topic of interest for Enlightenment intellectuals. There are indications, however, that Pombal did act to introduce new ideas and structures in his reforms. He was interested in movements in Europe, such as Gallicanism and regalism, which give more autonomy to “national” churches against Rome and the Pope. In his educational reform, at the university, he sought to modernize the faculties of theology and cannon law. Two new faculties were created, mathematics and philosophy, which included the new natural sciences, based on observation and experiment. In his transfer of censorship from the Inquisition to the state, he appointed

¹⁸ T. Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth, (Reprint of the 1691 edition) (Carbondale, 1965)

persons more identified with the reformist ideas so that books by Locke and Montesquieu previously banned were released, although books that contained “irreligion” were still not allowed. One of Pombal’s closest collaborators in educational and ecclesiastical reform, Antonio Ribeiro dos Santos, commented on the paradox of the authoritarian and enlightenment strains in his actions “(Pombal) wanted to civilize the nation and at the same time to enslave it. He wanted to spread the light of the philosophical sciences and at the same time to elevate the royal power of despotism”¹⁹ This suggests that, in the context of institutional change, seldom is there a direct confrontation between equivalent ideologies, but instead some interpretations begin to erode and, over time, other ideologies are substituted.

Extending those ideas, more recently Stallings has argued, that most useful for sociological theory is the idea that disasters create disruption in social routines.²⁰ The state has increasingly assumed more and more control over those disruptions since disasters create a threat to social order. One of the major functions of the state is to promote political order and social stability since predictability is necessary for decision making and strategic planning. Stallings says “That is the states’ disaster role is to minimize the disruptions to economic routines as quickly as possible when they are disrupted.”²¹

The identification of unique turning points in history cannot be easily determined by comparative and/or longitudinal analysis, but the case study of the Lisbon earthquake suggests certain reasonable conclusions. With the development of the modern state in

¹⁹ cited in Boxer, p.191

²⁰ R. Stallings, “Disaster and the Theory of Social Order” in E.L. Quarantelli (ed.) What is Disaster? Perspectives on The Question, (London 1998), p. 127-145

²¹ Stallings, p.142

Europe in the 18th century, notions of collective responsibility of the state for the welfare of “citizens” and for the continuity of the society make the Lisbon earthquake a test case for these changes. Changes in the social structure in Portugal, especially changes in the political and economic sectors, made the earthquake especially problematic. The Lisbon earthquake was the first modern disaster in which the state accepted the responsibility for mobilizing the emergency response and for developing and implementing a collective effort for reconstruction and in order to accomplish that, traditional notions of supernatural causation were opposed, rather harshly. This opposition was not directed toward the Portuguese church itself, but directed toward those segments of the church with more international and universal aspirations, the Jesuits. This shift in the interpretation of the meaning of disaster did not stem from sets of ideas concerning the nature of authority and liberty which has come to be identified as the Enlightenment but it stemmed from the efforts of Pombal to build a Portugal which was economically and politically more secure in the context of a competitive Europe.

In Candide, Voltaire uses the Lisbon earthquake as the backdrop for criticizing optimism which he saw then as prevalent among intellectuals. The entire work is filled with ironic images and situations, and includes a discussion between Candide and Pangloss of the sufficient cause of the earthquake as well as a discussion with a member of the Inquisition who is arguing for an interpretation of the earthquake as a consequence of sin. Voltaire says “After the earthquake, which had destroyed three fourths of Lisbon, the Portuguese pundits could not think of any better way of preventing total ruin than to treat the people to a splendid auto da fe.” Voltaire, thus, missed the ultimate irony – that

the last victim of the Inquisition was Malagrida who had insisted on a religious interpretation of the earthquake.