



## **The Lisbon earthquake and its aftershocks in European Enlightenment thinking and planning practice**

Dirk de Meyer

Ghent University, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning

From the Old Testament to Hollywood B-movies, from Sodom and Gomorrah to Los Angeles, the city is the topos of cataclysm. The first city-wide catastrophe that would have a major impact on modern European thinking was the earthquake and tsunami that, in 1755, reduced Lisbon to ruins, and killed about one tenth of its population.

This paper will look at the contemporary representations of that catastrophe and at its impact on European Enlightenment thinking and urban planning practices.

For Voltaire and Kant the Lisbon disaster had a major impact on the development of their philosophical and esthetical concepts. It strengthened Rousseau in his anti-urban thinking. For many others it gave way to that modern concept that later will be coined by Paul Valéry in his opening sentence of *La crise de l'esprit*: "we civilizations now know that we are mortal."

I will argue more in detail how, contrary to the rebuilding after the fire of London, where both proposed and realised plans hardly represented a radical new way of conceiving a city plan, the Lisbon reconstruction under the direction of the King's Prime Minister Pombal, can be understood as the start of urban planning as a modern practice — as opposed to earlier, architect-directed Renaissance and Baroque planning.

On a smaller scale we will look at the implementation, in the aftermath of the earthquake, of new anti-seismic building techniques in Lisbon's new constructions.