

Urban Palimpsests: Studying Enlightenment Influences
in the Post-Earthquake Rebuilding of Lima and Lisbon,
1746–1765

Emily Chung

Abstract:

Urban renewal has long existed as a vessel for the assertion of authority, embodying hierarchy, policy, and culture in the most tangible way with architecture and civic landscaping shaped to accommodate the upper strata of society. Particularly interesting to study through this lens is the latter half of the eighteenth century which marks the turning point between royal absolutism and the emergence of competing forms of power in the European Empire, through the growth of the Enlightenment movement.

This paper offers a comparison of two imperial cities, Lima and Lisbon, which due to similarly tragic earthquakes, were provided the opportunity to implement reforms at an urban scale, bringing opposing thought to the forefront of cultural debate and identity and redefining the roles of Church and State. Through an analysis of primary and secondary texts as well as original architectural documents, this study focuses on highlighting how urbanism can be used as a mechanism of power. With these sources, the paper compares the two events to synthesize a greater understanding of the roles of Lisbon and Lima as parts of the greater Iberian empires. Ultimately, this juxtaposition of the two cities provides a unique study of how architecture and urban morphology manifested the Spanish and Portuguese empires' respective Bourbon and Pombaline reforms, and the reasons for the differences in their impacts.

Author Bio: **Emily Chung**

Born in Berkeley, California, Emily is a third year Architecture major with a minor in History. Her academic interests include European urbanism and architectural history and design. When she's not studying, you can find her in the Dance Department or testing out new recipes in her kitchen. After receiving her B.Arch, she hopes to spend a couple of years in architectural practice before returning to school to pursue masters and eventually doctorate degrees in Urban History.

From Dinocrates' plan for Alexandria to Chicago's redlining, urban renewal has long existed as a vessel for the assertion of authority. In the cyclical struggles between the rich, the poor, and the State, cities offer themselves as a canvas onto which power is painted. They embody hierarchy, policy, and culture in the most tangible way, with architecture and civic landscaping shaped to accommodate the upper strata of society. Particularly interesting to study through this lens is the latter half of the eighteenth century, which marks the turning point between royal absolutism and the emergence of competing forms of power in European imperialism. As the scales started to swing away from monarchical systems, urban landscapes became the fighting grounds for conflicting parties. This essay compares two cities which, due to unforeseen natural disasters, found themselves forced into a process of reconstruction that brought opposing thought to the forefront of cultural debate and imperial identity, driven by a reexamination of the roles of Church and State.

In 1746 and 1755 respectively, Lima and Lisbon experienced severe shocks to their streets and hierarchical systems. On October 30th, 1746, Peru was struck by earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions, which destroyed buildings and infrastructure throughout the country. Their impact proved to be devastating to cities all along the coast, the most notable of which is Lima.¹ Nearly a decade later, a similar cataclysm befell Lisbon: on November 1st, 1755, Portugal was hit with a massive earthquake. Like in Peru, the initial phenomenon was followed by a tsunami, and together they razed the country and

¹ Charles Walker, *Shaky Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

its capital.² Despite the devastating nature of these events, these cities could now be interpreted as blank slates, providing unique opportunities for urban renewal to epitomize the greater European transition into modernism.

Concurrently in Western Europe, developments in the fields of science and mathematics instigated new philosophies condemning blind faith in the church and monarchism, propagating reason as the new driver for culture and leadership. With roots in the secularization movements of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, this shift involved a focus on intellectual and scientific reason. A period now discussed as “the Age of Enlightenment,” the movement associated with it advocated for order, proportion, and humanism, steering the Western continent towards secularization and liberty from monarchical systems.³

Guided by this new wave of thought and shifting power dynamics, the Spanish and Portuguese governments instigated a series of reforms to their empires. When the earthquakes hit Lisbon and Lima, not only did they provide an opportunity for the implementation of enlightened reforms, they also highlighted the attention—or lack thereof—given to these capitals by the heads of their respective empires. These projects of urban reconstruction followed the new policies, respectively dubbed the Bourbon and Pombaline reforms after their leaders, in prioritizing “enlightened” ideals. Despite this common foundation, the

² Mark Molesky, *This Gulf of Fire* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2015), 69-82.

³ Shirley Elson Roessler and Miklos Reinhold, *Europe 1715-1919: From Enlightenment to World War* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 1-2.

rebuilding of Lisbon and Lima in fact reflected the systemic differences in the two Iberian monarchies' interpretations of the movement, as well as emphasized the standing of each city within the imperial hierarchies.

Following the end of the Habsburg rule with Charles II's heirless death, Spain fell to the War of Spanish Succession out of which Frenchman Phillip of Anjou came out the victor. Under the Habsburgs, the Spanish empire had succumbed to severe corruption with the sale of offices and developed in the style of decentralized composite monarchies—within which the Church's influential reach had begun to threaten the Crown's authority. In an attempt to regain control of their territories and modernize the systems under which their empire was run, the Spanish Bourbon monarchs of the eighteenth century instigated a series of administrative and economic reforms, shifting the empire back towards royal absolutism.⁴ These “Bourbon Reforms”, were directly guided by the Enlightenment movement, following rational, scientific principles based on the ideas of contemporary theorists. Through this systemic restructuring of the empire, the Crown sought to reduce the power of the Church, establish a stronger presence in the colonies, and stimulate state finances through a streamlining of revenue from the American colonies.⁵

Inspired by the same wave of change which barreled through western Europe, the neighboring Portugal took steps in a similar direction.

4 Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic world in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms: 1713-1796* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

5 Ibid., 3

Coming out of the seventeenth century, Portugal had been impoverished, with Lisbon's medieval architecture reflecting a tardiness in the development of its social and political spheres as it lagged behind the increasingly neoclassical great European cities.⁶ This, however, changed as Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo—the first Marquis of Pombal and Secretary of the State of Internal Affairs to King Joseph I—rose to power in the 1750s. Under his leadership, the country experienced a series of comprehensive reforms aimed towards establishing Lisbon as a culturally and industrially progressive capital in the global economic system, through a more autocratic government. The Pombaline reforms took on themes of nationalism and Enlightenment thinking through policy and urban restructuring, and affected the social, political, religious, military, and economic realms of the empire's affairs. Through these new policies, Pombal followed in the footsteps of some of his European neighbors in focusing his efforts on industrialization, secularization, and financial rationalization, all of which manifested themselves in the Portuguese capital following the 1755 earthquake and through the rest of the century.⁷

In studying the Pombaline and Bourbon reforms in a post-disaster climate, one must look to pre-existing discussions. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies of either reform, Charles Walker's *Shaky Colonialism* delves into post-earthquake Lima to track the reconstruction of the city, and how internal and external pressures guided the

6 David Kendrick Underwood, “The Pombaline Style and International Neoclassicism in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 53.

7 Underwood, 93.

process.⁸ Equally important to consider, despite the larger scope, is John Fisher's *Bourbon Peru: 1750-1824*, which brings up important issues in discussing Peru's reforms and the extent of their effectiveness.⁹ Even so, these are only two sources in a larger pool of literature on Lima's development.¹⁰ On the Lisbon side, a number of scholarly articles have zeroed in on the Pombaline reconstruction of the city, mapping out the its political dynamics and the administrative responses.¹¹ The content provided by these well-researched academic sources is incredibly valuable in painting the landscape of the events. However, while it is clear the reconstructions of Lima and Lisbon have both been thoroughly analyzed individually, this paper seeks not to summarize, but to juxtapose the two conditions in search of new answers. In drawing from these sources, alongside drafts and images depicting architectural elements of each city, the following text is guided by two leading questions: To what extent did Lima and Lisbon respectively integrate or reject enlightenment principles in their post-earthquake rebuilding? And how might architecture embody nuances in each region's socio-political climate? The contextual similarities of both events allow for a unique opportunity to study the parallels and

8 Walker, *Shaky Colonialism*.

9 John Fisher. *Bourbon Peru: 1750-1824* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

10 Gabriel Ramon. "Bourbon Maneuvers in the Plaza: Shifting Urban Models in Late Colonial Lima". *Urban History* 44, no. 4 (2016).

11 Richard Hamblyn, *Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); John R. Mullin, "The Reconstruction of Lisbon Following the Earthquake of 1755: A Study in Despotism Planning," *The Journal of the International History of City Planning Association* 45 (1992); Andrew Ginger, "The 'Enlightenment,' the *Longue Durée*, and Catholic Visions of the Lisbon Disaster: Spain 1755-1756", *Dieciocho* 38, no. 2, (Fall 2015): 173-196.

polarities between the cities, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the Iberian Enlightenment.

Following the earthquakes in 1746 and 1755, a majority of Lima and Lisbon was destroyed. Without discrimination, the disasters hit the homes of the rich and the poor, the Church and the State. In this state of rubble, the cities became slates onto which the royalties would write. In the eighteenth-century post-earthquake rebuilding of Lima and Lisbon, architecture served as a physical manifestation of the reforms and conflicts characteristic of this era. This comparison of urban morphology reveals key differences in the Peruvian viceroy and Pombaline approaches to Enlightenment thinking, as one used the opportunity to reinforce its standing as a great European city, while the other's compromises highlighted the fragility of imperial rule.

In the New World, where Spanish colonialism and Spanish Catholicism were two sides of the same imperial coin, ecclesiastic monuments staked out the spread of Christianity from parish churches in the hinterlands of the colonial reach to the grand Cathedrals of urban hubs. As the Spanish crown shifted with the rest of Europe into the Age of Enlightenment, however, nuances of anti-clericalism started to bleed into Peru's viceroy rule. In Lima, a city with a high concentration of religious buildings, those frictions came head to head as the earthquake destroyed secular and clerical buildings alike, requiring the rebuilding of the Cathedral as part of the city's urban fabric.¹² Where previously there had stood an ornately Baroque monument to Catholicism, now only the structure's nave remained, its two bell

12 Walker, *Shaky Colonialism*, 108.

towers having crumbled in the disaster. Under Viceroy Manso de Velasco's direction, the city's reconstruction took on themes of Spain's Bourbon reforms, with rationality and reason guiding the design of Lima and consequently the future of Lima's cathedral.

With Enlightenment thinking inspiring movement toward royal absolutism, the earthquake and its aftermath proved to be an opportunity for Manso de Velasco to implement Bourbon policies—in particular by seeing a regression of the Church and its independent power which over time had grown in presence, threatening the monarchy's rule. Many reformers saw the Catholic Church as excessive and in the words of Manso, “errantly pious.” They denounced the elaborate sculpture and ornamentation of the cathedral which, while having been typical of the Baroque, were considered as distasteful and gaudy.¹³

Crucial to understanding the Bourbon reforms, however, is the acknowledgement that contrary to other countries in Europe, Spain sought not to weaken the Church, but rather to fold its power and loyalty under the Crown rather than the Vatican.¹⁴ Therefore, Manso de Velasco had the towers reconstructed in the austere and rational Neoclassical style which aligned with the regime's regalian priorities (fig.1) not to undermine the importance of the structure, but rather to symbolize the shift in alliance the Spanish Crown hoped to see. This reconstruction was to establish that under Bourbon rule, “faith is what must be grand, not the temples themselves,” a guiding principle which

¹³ Ibid., 79.

¹⁴ Ibid., 110.

Viceroy Manso sought to implement.¹⁵ In contrast to the cathedral's richly sculpted nave, the new towers displayed functional geometry and form, following the tenets of order and reason quintessential in Enlightenment thinking. The incongruous result (fig.2) reflects the divided rule of Lima, where Church and State grappled for power of the city.

This rationality and proportion of Neoclassical design were guiding concepts in Manso's plan for Lima, and with Frenchman Louis Godin's help and support, the regime set about developing a new plan for the city. Under Godin's suggestions, the capital was to have wider and straighter streets (fig. 3), replace masonry with wattle and daub, and limit buildings to shorter single-story heights—moves typical of the Enlightenment era, which were intended to control the urban masses and work towards solving inequalities.¹⁶ Leading up to the great earthquake, Lima's elites had used architectural ornamentation as a public manifestation of their status and wealth, lining the streets with sculpture and balconies. To Manso, however, this overindulgence seemed to have incited God's wrath and played a part in bringing on this unforeseen tragedy: “The vanity of Lima's inhabitants, who, driven by the abundance of their treasures, had erroneously built the city . . . so ran against God's prophecies that he had sent the general destruction we are now facing.”¹⁷ In the viceroy's eyes, these architectural flaunts had acted as a taunt, provoking this dramatic reprimand. The reconstruction was a chance for Manso to rectify this affront, and the

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶ Charles Walker, “Upper Classes and their Upper Stories”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (2003): 68-69.

¹⁷ Walker, *Shaky Colonialism*, 78.



Fig. 1: Flat Profile and Elevation of the Cathedral of Lima's Towers, 1794.
 Source: España, El ministerio de edcación cultural y deporte. AGI, Mapas y Planos, Lima-Peru 244.



Fig. 2: The Lima Cathedral
 Source: *Lima. The Cathedral*. Library of Congress. Lima Peru, 1868. Photograph.
<http://www.loc.gov/item/2006679717/>.

viceroys developed a plan which would restrict the use of ostentatious embellishment on the renovated façades.

This, however, came under serious scrutiny and heavy contestation from Lima's upper class, who claimed a right to upper story apartments as a display of their wealth and standing in the social hierarchy.

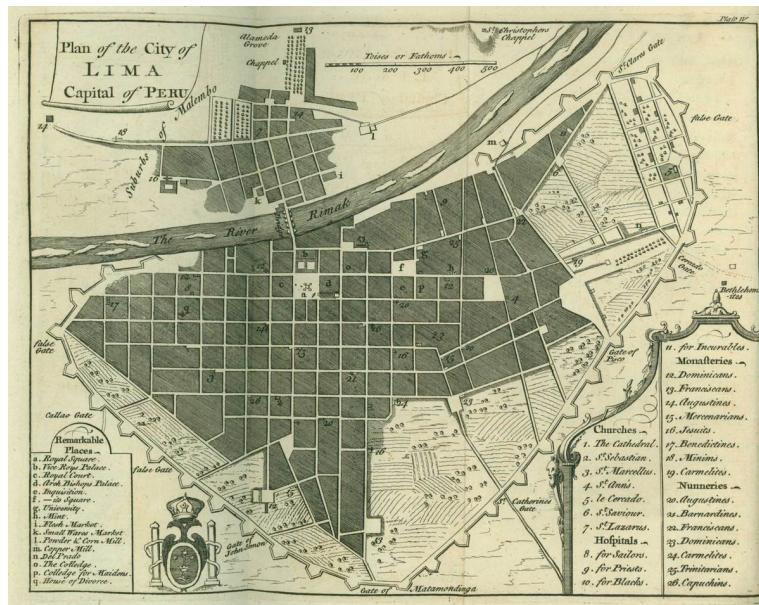


Fig. 3: Plan of Lima

Source: Lozano, Pedro, 1697–1752, "Plan of the City of Lima, Capital of Peru," *Loyola University Chicago Digital Special Collections*.

While Manso's plan projected an orderly and homogenous Neoclassical new city, Lima's elites felt the stylistic revival to be a threat to their status as fears of social upheaval rose.¹⁸ Under the guise of tradition, spatial availability, and cost of reconstruction, the city's *vicenos* —elites—fought for a preservation of Baroque elements such as balconies and ornamentation and by extension, second stories. After a lengthy battle between regularity and elaborate grandeur, Manso de Velasco gave in to the *vicenos* demands allowing second stories and key Baroque elements, for without the unified support of the elite, "it was impossible to govern the republic . . . and there were many motives for [Manso] to attend to this all-important task."¹⁹ With the urban order of Lima already thoroughly upheaved from the catastrophe, the viceroy admitted that giving in to some of the *vicenos*' demands would mitigate further disruptions to the "economic and social codes that sustained Spanish urbanism."²⁰ As such, Lima was reborn as a compromise of two eras characterized by Neoclassical communal urbanism and private Baroque frontages, projecting this turning point in colonial Peruvian history onto streets and the buildings which line them. The result of this great earthquake is a city which can still be read as an architectural palimpsest of sorts, embodying the city's cultural shift out of Spain's golden age of imperial rule and into an era of autonomy and eventual independence for Latin America.

Eight years later and across the seas, when Lisbon was hit with its own severe earthquake, many of the same tensions and struggles

18 Ibid., 63.

19 Ibid., 79.

20 Ibid., 79.

resurged. This time however, the reconstruction's leader implemented urban reforms which would serve to reassert his own rule and power, effectively undermining those of the Church and the nobility.²¹

In the wake of the catastrophe, Pombal rose out of the rubble to head the reconstruction movement. In a time when chaos and despair ruled Lisbon, Pombal saw a future driven by order and reason. Inspired by other famous philosophers of the era, such as Christopher Wren and Voltaire, the marquis' administration developed a new Lisbon, following principles of Enlightenment thinking to transition into the era of modernity.²²

As in Lima, Lisbon's cathedral severely suffered from the earthquake; when the dust settled, a crumbled cathedral was revealed, with the towers having fallen into the nave. And, as in Lima, this became an opportunity for the administration in charge to reinforce its policies, which under Pombal favored secularization. Despite the reconstruction of the Lisbon Cathedral employing certain Neoclassical geometries, the design was predominantly medieval, reconstructing the previously Gothic facade to emulate the monument's original medieval style (fig. 4). While the rest of Lisbon moved into the contemporary era, the cathedral stuck out as *retardataire* in aesthetic, the medieval design contrasting heavily to the now predominantly Neoclassical city. By refusing to rebuild the cathedral in the

21 John Mullin, "The Reconstruction of Lisbon Following the Earthquake of 1755: A Study in Despotic Planning," *The Journal of the International History of City Planning Association* 45 (1992), https://works.bepress.com/john_mullin/48/.

22 Hamblyn, *Romanticism*, 110.

grandiose Baroque or Gothic styles, Pombal was perhaps declaring the rule of Christianity in Portugal to be moving into obsolescence, a thing of the past. Furthermore, while Spain and Manso de Velasco had used the reconstruction of the Lima Cathedral as a symbol of power consolidation, the Portuguese administration simply abstained from rebuilding the Inquisition headquarters.²³ In time, Pombal would eventually take his fight against the Church one step further, "in 1769 [moving] against the inquisition itself, destroying its power as an independent tribunal and making it dependent on the government."²⁴ With these moves, Pombal reinforced his position towards secularization, establishing the church as a subordinate of the state and bringing Lisbon another step closer to the rest of "enlightened" Europe.

The cathedral was not the only instrument Pombal used to exemplify his power. The Marquis' approach to the city's reconstruction garnered strong objection from the city's nobility, who resented Pombal's authoritarianism.²⁵ Where Velasco had capitulated to the *vicenos*' demands, however, Pombal yielded little ground to the Lisbon aristocracy—commanding the public execution of such dissidents—and moved forward with a raze and rebuild approach to the city.²⁶ Despite the tragedy of the earthquake, urban renewal now served as a handy tool in Pombal's belt, providing him with an opportunity to rebuild the city as the epitome of "national economic independence

23 Ibid., 111.

24 Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 91.

25 Mullin, 3.

26 Hamblyn, 118.



Fig. 4: The Lisbon Cathedral

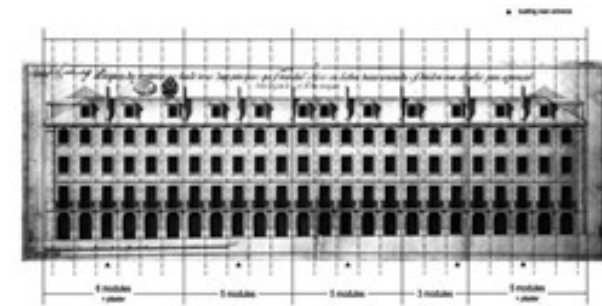
Source: Wikimedia Commons. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S%C3%A9_de_Lisboa_-_s%C3%A9culo_XIX.jpg#filehistory.

and a modern, well-regulated, and utilitarian state.”²⁷ Laying out the capital into a grid pattern, the administration developed a plan which fought back against the region’s natural topography, imposing order and asserting the regime’s power.²⁸ Furthermore, in implementing his vision for the city, the Marquis employed facade detailing as an emulation of success, achieving a sense a grandeur not through rich ornamentation but by evoking the powerful splendor of Paris, London, and other such European capitals through the controlled Neo-

²⁷ Maxwell, 27.

²⁸ Mullin, 11.

classicism fashionable in such cities.²⁹ Where the Baroque style had been opulent and organic, the Neoclassicism here applied to Lisbon reflected a regimented sense of structure and homogeneity. Along the straightened streets, facades followed a standardized pattern of proportion and solid-void ratios creating a fabric of utilitarian regularity (fig. 5). In time, Lisbon would become a physical embodiment of Pombal’s power and reflect his dedication to reason and rationality, pushing the city into Europe’s Age of Enlightenment.



The block façade for the main streets: scheme showing how was achieved the uniformity in the design by means of a modular composition of the building lots (the slight distortion seen is due to state of conservation of the document).

Source: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa, AAC, PT/AMLSB/AL/CMLSB/UROB-PU/01/001.

Fig. 5

The differing extents of success in the reformist planning of Lima and Lisbon can be attributed to a variety of factors, which accumulate to account for the discrepancies. With Europe having established itself as the epicenter of Enlightenment thinking, Portugal was, in the eighteenth century, surrounded by like-minded philosophers and

²⁹ Underwood, 99.

politicians supporting the ideals upheld in the Pombaline reforms. With the inspiration of famous Enlightenment theorists and the Neo-classical precedence set forward from other European capitals, the Pombal administration showed stronger resolve in the implementation of urban order as a tool for control.

Moreover, as Spain's standing in the European power structure began to decline, pressures on the Crown both external—such as the conflict between the neighboring British and French over the North American Colonies—and internal—with situations in the Caribbean and Mexico threatening the stability of Spanish imperialism—acted such that the Peruvian Viceroyalty fell lower in the monarchy's priorities.³⁰ While Lisbon was the seat of Portuguese power and thus held considerable symbolism for the country, Lima's standing in the Spanish empire was slipping as other Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires rose in importance, and as such the integration of Bourbon principles along the Peruvian coast became a lesser concern for the Crown. This, alongside the colony's distance from Europe—which meant a much lower concentration of Enlightenment culture—left space for negotiation between Eurocentric traditionalists and the Velasco regime, and together work towards explaining the disparity in the extent of implemented reform in the two countries.

The tensions seen in this post-earthquake era did not wane as the cities were reconstructed, and in fact kept escalating, eventually contributing to the breakdown of Iberian imperialism in the Amer-

30 Fisher, 28.

icas.³¹ As enmity grew between the royalties and their upper classes, the new urban architecture came to display opposite reactions to the conflict in Lima and Lisbon, with the former exhibiting a developing sense of *Criollo* independence and the latter a manifestation of authoritarianism. Such responses certainly reflect the futures of these cities: Pombal's iron fist rule which restructured Lisbon into a rational city would help secure its position as a European capital, meanwhile, the wavering Spanish authority in Lima would continue to be questioned and defied, with this anti-imperial sentiment growing through the rest of the eighteenth century and eventually leading towards a fight for independence in Peru seventy years later.

Furthermore, with the church and royalties at odds, the reconstruction reforms served to force secularization on the Christian communities of these cities. This Enlightenment-supported movement would carry on into the nineteenth century, with European countries moving towards State-held consolidations of power. In time, the reconstruction of Lima and Lisbon would prove to be a turning point in the political histories of their countries, moving them into an era of industrialism, secularization, and independence.

31 Walker, *Shaky Colonialism*, 58.

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