

## TRANSFORMATIONS TO LISBON'S TERREIRO DO PAÇO

DIANE BRAND

Address: School of Architecture Victoria University of Wellington NEW ZEALAND

Email: [diane.brand@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:diane.brand@vuw.ac.nz)

### ABSTRACT

*After a devastating earthquake, tsunami and fire in 1755, Lisbon's Terreiro do Paço, or Palace Square, was transformed by the Marquis of Pombal into a state of the art 18th century urban space called Praça do Comércio. This paper looks at the configuration and use of this space from the 16th to the 18th century, tracing customary, ceremonial and institutional events, with particular reference to the role of ephemeral architecture in reconfiguring the space's relationship to either river or land. An analysis of the paintings in Lisbon's Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Navy Archives), Museu da Cidade de Lisboa (City Museum of Lisbon) and the Museu Nacional dos Coches (National Coach Museum) shows the square transitioned over two centuries from a space fully engaging the Tagus to a condition that captured the space and engaged it with the reconstructed city quarter behind.*

### INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to show how, over several centuries, the Terreiro do Paço has transitioned from a space where customary uses have fully engaged the River, to a condition where the space has been reclaimed by the city beyond. This transition had as much to do with various institutional presences as it did with the ephemeral structures which graced the space during state occasions and sought to re-orient the square towards either city or sea. A range of ceremonial and institutional occasions will be examined, including royal and religious processions, autos da fé and commercial exchange. Each occasion had a suite of ephemeral architectures which altered the space of the square for a particular purpose, sometimes using the adjacent water to good effect, sometime not. Only upon the completion of Pombal's post-disaster design did an axial resolution for the space finally settle the directional thrust of the square, and transform the excess and terror of the past into a static and bureaucratically neutral place right at the heart of Portugal's capital.

Zucker (1959) makes the case for Pombal's eighteenth century state of the art waterfront square as an example of a dominated square where the River Tagus acts as a fourth façade, providing the square with its spatial emphasis. While this was true of the Praça do Comércio in its ultimate form, an analysis of paintings from Lisbon's Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Navy Archives), Museu da Cidade de Lisboa (City Museum of Lisbon) and the Museu Nacional dos Coches (National Coach Museum), which depict the space from the fifteenth century onwards, reveals a more complex story of functional re-configurations, ephemeral enhancement and diverse ceremonial use, all of which impact on the reading of the space.

### THE WATERFRONT SQUARE IN LISBON

The waterfront square in Lisbon has traditionally functioned as an urban maritime nexus. A 1650 plan of the city shows the flat tidal zones of the river banks hosting a necklace of waterfront spaces from Belém, near the mouth of the Tagus, to the city core (*Figure 1 Panorama of Lisbon before the 1755 Earthquake* (authors unknown) Museu da Cidade de Lisboa). The square is an enduring tradition in Portuguese urbanism (Teixeira and Valla, 1999, 315). In Lisbon the principal waterfront square has been variously known as O Terreiro do Paço (Palace Square) (pre-1755), and A Praça do Comércio (Commercial Square) (post-1755). In 1755, Lisbon was hit by a series of disasters. A devastating earthquake, tsunami and fire killed more than 10,000 people (of a population of 250,000) and destroyed 20,000 homes, churches and civic buildings including the Ribeiro Palace which was located adjacent to the Terreiro do Paço.

Each pocket of waterfront space relates to a major institutional presence which has a functional interface with the water. These include the royal arsenal, the royal palace, the customhouse and the market. These waterfront zones of public space are so fundamental to the life-blood of the city that they have endured the physical reconfigurations wrought on the town's steep hillsides by Romans, Visigoths, Moors, and Christians, and remain resistant as primary structural elements in the urban landscape (Rossi, 1982). The principal square, Terreiro do Paço, developed around the royal palace on land which, up until 1170, had been submerged beneath an inlet of the Tagus (Gutkind, 1965, 62).

*Figure 2* View of Terreiro do Paço before the 1755 Earthquake [Dirk Stoop] shows the daily bustle of commerce, exchange and gathering rather than a grand ceremonial occasion. The image shows courtiers processing in coaches, clergy and noblewomen promenading on foot, people congregating at the well, men weighing and carrying goods to be loaded into the holds of ships at anchor, cavaliers riding horses, troops exercising and children walking their dogs. While this provides us with a glimpse into the 17th century habitual use of the space and its crucial relationship to the river, it is the Palace which transforms the space into a transition zone between river and city.

*Figure 3* A Topographical Plan of the City of Lisbon [Carvalho and Mardel] from 1755, shows the post-earthquake plan of Lisbon superimposed onto the pre-earthquake plan of Lisbon. Over the next two centuries the waterfront square was transformed from a water-oriented space to a landlocked one. Terreiro do Paço evolved from a, water oriented space in the 17th century to a, land-oriented space in the 18th century. The elongated form of the space in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with its geometric configuration (Carita 1998), its long edge to water, multiple access points to the river via piers and bridges and the dense impermeability of the rear wall were yet to be transformed by architecturally articulated hierarchies of enclosing facades and a symmetrical and axial Renaissance plan.

## TOWARDS THE TAGUS

The royal palace dominates the entire western side of the Terreiro do Paço and therefore it is ceremonial use which prevails in the space, especially the arrivals and departures of royals and foreign dignitaries. This naturally predicated a higher level of engagement with the Tagus. Smaller scale elements such as piers and bridges are positioned to direct the processional use of space into an ill defined square from the sea, the principal mode of travel for this maritime nation before the nineteenth century.

Naval predominance and royal hegemony are the hallmarks of many of the images of the Terreiro do Paço up until the early 18th century, where emphasis is given to the sea and vessels not the city. *Figure 4* Panorama of Terreiro do Paço and the Disembarkation of Filipe II [Lavanha] shows the spectacular arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese monarch in Lisbon. Half of the image is filled with the watery foreground in front of the square, and a mass of sailing vessels of all sizes and types swarming on the Tagus (the larger vessels appear super-sized for visual effect). The Palace and the temporary structures installed for the occasion are drawn at similar scale to the ships, giving them the sense of being beached objects or vessels themselves, rather than part of the medieval crust of the city. Other buildings fade into the uniform grain of the town behind with only the churches registering a higher order of detail and importance. Techniques of graphic projection shift to give emphasis to the square and the river which are depicted in perspective while the city is shown in elevation behind.

Graphic embellishment, such as the finely rendered texture of the waves at the bottom of the picture and billowing plumes of canon fire at either extremity, focus the eye on the bottom half of the frame. There is a concentration of activity in this zone with barques, barges, fishing boats, and row boats moving in different directions on the page. The bows of these vessels point to the King's ceremonial barge at the pier. The scene shows lateen rig and square rig vessels sailing in contrary winds to achieve this effect while the myriad of ensigns unfurl to the east in a westerly wind. As with the portolan chart representations of exotic foreign destinations this image evokes the natural and mythical worlds. In the left-hand

foreground there is a dolphin, a massive lobster, a mermaid and a Neptunian figure carried by seahorses across the surf. A compass, its needle adorned with an anchor, decorates the centre bottom of the image.

The square is articulated with a centrally located dais and an entrance arch at the land edge of the pier extending into the Tagus. These 'sets' function as props to direct the procession into the city beyond. West of the dais is a grid of supersized columns that extends to the northern and western walls of the square. Crowds are dwarfed by these monuments and cluster like ants at the river's edge to glean a view of the on-water festivities. The river in this instance is the expandable fourth facade to the square and a space which can effortlessly double and treble the scale of any important spectacle.

Bridges were also common threshold devices for marking the moment of transition between the land and sea. A bridge structure was a permanent fixture on the arsenal side of the palace and was lavishly adorned for state occasions. *Figure 5 The Embarkation of Princess Catherine of Portugal the Wife of Charles II King of England [1622]* shows the Princess of Portugal and wife of the King of England leaving the Palace via this bridge. Dom João V also had a long, elegant and sumptuously decorated bridge built to honour the arrival of his bride Dona Maria Sofia Isabel of Bavaria in 1687. The structure's myriad of arches decorated in crimson velvet and gold.

The foregoing discussion highlights the authority of the Portuguese monarchy and its ceremonial use of the river and the square as a theatre for state events. The royals enjoyed a long tradition of urban maritime ceremony related to the arrival and departure of monarchs and foreign dignitaries in Lisbon. The harbour arena and the waterfront square were spatially contiguous and provided an ideal arena in which to stage the significant events of public life. The court maximised the juxtaposition of a spacious landscape setting with regal pageantry and extravagant maritime ceremony became an all important ongoing public relations exercise for a minor European monarchy.

## CLOSURE AND CRUELTY

On occasions involving sacrifice or death, the Tagus was separated from the space for functional or scenographic reasons. In such instances the space became a closed square (Zucker 1959, 9), an inwardly focused theatre for the macabre rituals of death and punishment. In 1536, amid the post-Reformation climate of Catholic intolerance of Protestant heresies, the Portuguese empire was granted permission to follow Spain's inquisitional practices and hunt out and punish infidels. Jews, Muslims and anyone else contravening the church's teachings were exiled, forced to convert as 'new Christians' or became victims of the inquisitional machinery. The church under royal patronage became an ecclesiastical authority with unlimited power of arrest, trial and punishment. The autonomous body of the Holy Inquisition emerged from Lisbon's sacred places into the public realm and, because of its proximity to royal authority, the location of choice was the Terreiro do Paço.

These public rituals, which enacted a metaphor of trial and judgement blatantly aligned with the last judgement (Flynn 1991, 285-286), were called *auto da fé* (act of faith), and they cast a pall over the public and private lives of Lisbon's citizenry. The first *auto da fé* in Portugal was staged in 1541 (Sariva, 1956, 182). Over a period of 143 years 38 autos were held and 1379 people were burned. Between 1642 and 1683 all autos were held at the Terreiro do Paço (Branco, 1969, 293). Unlike the modest medieval ceremonies for the excommunication of religious dissidents that predated them, the *auto da fé* were robust and collective occasions involving hundreds of participants, enacted in the Terreiro do Paço on well planned specially built elevated structures. These raked platforms, referred to respectively as tiered benches of honour and infamy, gave expression to an earthly hierarchy of power and debasement, with the inquisitors (displacing the nobility) and heretics being seated at the top of their respective scaffolds above the central stage. *Figure 6* shows a carpenter's drawing of the stage of an *auto da fé* from 1629. The numbers of guilty swelled as the inquisitions proceeded at pace, with the escalating persecution of recently converted Jews requiring more frequent and more extravagant commemorations of religious devotion and state fealty. The *auto*

da fé of June 1756 in Lisbon was devised as a collective atonement for the earthquake of the previous year (Voltaire, 1795, 15).

The choreography and scenography of the occasion deliberately sought to engage the guilt of the population. The event was dramatised by a purposeful and solemn procession from the church or prison to the square, and symbolised in the ephemeral structures which represented God's terrestrial pecking order. The processions were orchestrated to pass through the main streets of the city and resemble civic processions and royal entries. Properties adjacent to the public square were controlled by the inquisitors who allocated viewing rights to constituents. Flynn explains in the context of Spain, the potent mix of corporal sacrifice and public setting:

In Counter-Reformation Spain, it was the fear of hell and its torments brought on by centuries of meditation on the Apocalypse that produced the Inquisition's frightful theater of cruelty. Standing on platforms erected in the center of urban life, victims of the autos de fé embodied the sin that weighed on the minds of the public. With their acts of contrition, they purged communities of religious guilt and with their blood; they appeased the wrath of a vindictive God. (Flynn, 1991, 296)

A prototypical stage from 1634 which abutted the Ribeiro Place's west facade was described as being 30.8 metres long and 19.8 metres wide (Branco 1969, 294). Two terraced banks of seating flanked the space where the trials and executions took place and there were separate access stairways (some concealed and privileging direct access to the palace or church behind) for individuals of different rank (royals, clergy magistrates etc). The stages for the condemned were also multi-levelled to reflect a hierarchy of misdemeanour with the most despicable at the top. Nautical imagery was invoked with carpenters' descriptions of the structures mentioning 'masts' to support 'sails' which protected the stage from sun and rain (Bethencourt, 1992, 61). 'Costumes of infamy' or sambenitos were also part of the spectacle. These featured mitred hats and decorated tunics which signified the form of execution. For example those with flames pointing down indicated the wearer had repented and would be strangled before being burnt.

*Figure 7 Execution of Criminals Condemned by the Inquisition in the Terreiro do Paço Bernard Picart [sixteenth century] shows the convicted being burned alive. Higgs (1999, 123) speculates that this image depicts the burning of sodomites in Terreiro do Paço with an all male audience, coaches and no spectators cramming the windows of the Palace. It is a representation which is atypical of the genre, where elaborate stage settings and costumed participants were normally carefully managed and documented.*

Typically, the auto was executed on a higher stage for the full view of the crowds with the victim well elevated above the flames to make the death slower and more excruciating. This arrangement exploited the water as a natural backdrop to invoke the presence of another world, and the ceremony was left until the day's end or evening for the light and colour of the flames to contrast more dramatically with the dark sky and foreboding waters beyond. An eye-witness account of a British national resident in Portugal in 1707 reports the horror of the event and the uncomfortable proximity of royal viewers:

Heytor Dias and Maria Pinteyra were burnt alive and the other two first strangled. The execution was very cruel. The woman was alive in the flames for half an hour, and the man above an hour. The present King (João V, 1706-50) and his brothers were seated at a window so near, as to be addressed to a considerable time, in very moving terms by the man who was burning...but all his entreaties could not procure him a larger allowance of wood to shorten his misery and dispatch him. (Higgs, 1999, 122)

The spectacle of the public auto da fé diminished in the late 17th and early 18th century in Portugal, and finally ended in 1821. The practice returned to the churches, cloisters and tribunal headquarters from whence it came, although official lists of stigmatised individuals were still being circulated well into the late 18th century.

In the autos da fé the obsession with the procedural, scenographic and theatrical aspects of the event was calculated to manipulate and maximise the drama and the

fear of the occasion. Closure of the space was important to firstly create a functioning amphitheatre and secondly to seal the place off spatially from the real world beyond, thereby creating a royally sanctioned entertainment zone of suspended consciousness, behaviour and voyeuristic pleasure outside the norm (Boyer, 1994, 86).

## TOWARDS THE TOWN

The 1755 All Saints' Day earthquake in Lisbon was comparable in scale [an estimated 9.0 on the Richter scale] and international impact to the 2006 tsunami in South East Asia. Shocks were felt throughout Portugal, Madeira, the Azores, and as far away as Finland and North Africa. Tsunamis affected the Caribbean and the Atlantic coasts of England and Ireland. Aid came from Portugal's colonies and her allies and trading partners England, Germany and Holland. Strategically local merchants donated a 4% surcharge on imports to the relief effort.

The man in charge of reconstruction effort, the Minister of State, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Mello, the future Marquis of Pombal, was decisive and commanding in his response to the disaster relief and the forward planning of the city. The city was surveyed, new construction prohibited and looters were publicly hung. Monasteries and public squares were filled with the homeless, and tent cities occupied by merchants and nobles sprouted. The military engineer to the court Manuel da Maia presented four options investigating variations of street widening, ground re-levelling, adjusted building heights, all contributing to a radical new block morphology, residential building typology (Barreiros, 2008) and sense of urban scale (Rossa, 1998). The plan proceeded with a new gridded layout for the Baixa quarter based on planning precedents in Northern Europe. A prefabricated, technically innovative and stylistically simplified four storey building type was developed which ingeniously incorporated fire walls and earthquake resistant timber frames.

The Terreiro do Paço was reconstructed and renamed the Praça do Comércio (Commerce Square) *Figure 8*. The Bragança dynasty and the Jesuits whom Pombal had previously sought to disempower were displaced by the city's economic elites; the merchants and bankers. The space encompassed business, city government, customs and exchange in an effort to stimulate trade and industry, and rebuild Portugal's flagging fortunes.

The reconstruction of Lisbon presented an opportunity to integrate the waterfront square into the urban fabric. The new, monumentally scaled proposal reclaimed more land, used symmetry and architecture to integrate a complex of buildings embracing the space into the urban fold, and created a powerful central axis penetrating into the city behind via Rua Augusta, thereby linking the square to the Rossio (Lisbon's other principal square) beyond. Pombal's project redressed the problems which had beset the Terreiro as an urban square, but in doing so ruptured the longstanding bias the space had towards the water.

## CONCLUSION

Urban theorists (Rykwert, 1976 and Kostof, 1991, 37-41) have identified the symbiotic relationship between the city's public spaces as containers and festivals as urban ceremony, arguing that the city form and its institutions are modified by ritual use just as the pageant itself is directed by the physicality of the built environment it occupies. Viscentini (2008) shows convincingly how the design and placement of buildings and public spaces fronting the Grand Canal in Renaissance and Baroque Venice was influenced by the ceremonial demands of the Doges.

The Terreiro do Paço transformed over two centuries from a sea directed space to a land directed one through reclamation, redesign and changes in adjacent uses. The royal command of the space occurred at the intersection of Lisbon's hegemony during the age of discovery and her global colonial reach as a maritime power. As a sea oriented space the arrangement worked, but once ashore, land ceremonies struggled for choreographic and scenographic clarity except when completely closed from the water for the killing rituals of the auto da fé. In spite of being unwieldy this configuration came closest to demonstrating the possibilities of the

rich overlapping of city and river when the urban, technological and cultural conditions were right.

Urban change was sudden and dramatic when it came and the 1755 earthquake provided the ultimate opportunity for the Marquis of Pombal to restructure not only the space, but also the institutional guardianship of the place, while simultaneously creating a state of the art urban square. The transition illustrates not only the morphological change of the square as it evolved over time, but also the effect of an abrupt change in institutional adjacency and the impact on the consequent ceremonial use of the space. In resolving the urban design issues of the space the new proposal made the ephemera of the past redundant.

Ultimately the demise of the Terreiro do Paço and the ephemeral paraphernalia of ceremony was cataclysmic in natural, political, and architectural terms, and had far reaching implications for ceremonial use. While the formal relationships with the Tagus were enhanced by an enlightenment makeover, the ceremonial and functional connections from which the vitality of the location was derived were denied continuity. The bureaucratic functions of urban government and the pragmatic concerns of trade and commerce were no longer driven or mandated to routinely showcase their activities in the public realm, and the bustling port was now developing to the west of the Praça itself.

Urban waterfronts are typically zones of power given their territorial scarcity and technological and strategic commodity. They are therefore zones of competition. The Terreiro do Paço was a royal space which transformed, almost overnight, into a commercial one. The Terreiro do Paço epitomised the rich possibilities of layering different types architectural space over a short physical distance between a city and water. The Baixa and Praça do Comércio were exemplars at the time of a new monumental urban square and the technically innovative redevelopment of an urban quarter. This paper highlights that the convergence of institutional presence and ceremonial practice on urban waterfronts is mutable and as subject to the ebb and flow of the urban aspirations of the cities they serve as the itinerant flotillas they host.



Figure 1: Panorama of Lisbon before the 1755 earthquake [author unknown] Museu da Cidade de Lisboa



Figure 2: View of Terreiro do Paço before the 1755 earthquake [Dirk Stoop] Museu da Cidade de Lisboa



Figure 3. A Topographical Plan of the city of Lisbon [Carvalho and Mardel] 1755 Museu da Cidade de Lisboa



Figure 4. Panorama of Terreiro do Paço and the disembarkation of Filipe II [Lavanha] Museu da Cidade de Lisboa



Figure 5. The embarkation of Princess Catherine of Portugal the wife of Charles II King of England [1622] Museu da Cidade de Lisboa

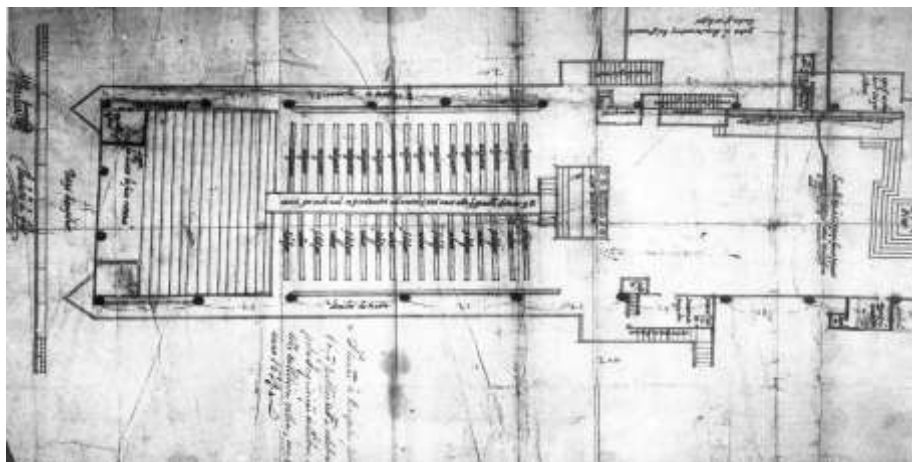


Figure 6. Drawing of the stage of an auto da fé [1629] Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa





Figure 7. Execution of criminals condemned by the Inquisition in the Terreiro do Paço Museu da Cidade de Lisboa [Bernard Picart] sixteenth century



Figure 8. Praça do Comércio [Diane Brand] 2004

## REFERENCES

- Barreiros, M.H. (2008) "Urban Landscapes: Houses, Streets and Squares of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Lisbon", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12, 205-232.
- Bethencourt, F. (1992) "The Auto da fé: Ritual and Imagery", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 55, 155 - 168.
- Bonnemaison, S. and Macy, C. (Eds) (2008) *Festival Architecture* (London, Routledge).
- Boyer, M. C. (1994) *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press).
- Branco, F. C. (1969) *Lisboa Seiscentista* (Lisboa, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa).
- Flynn, M. (1991) "Mimesis of the last judgment: The Spanish auto de fe", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22, 2, 281-297.

- Carita, H. (1998) Lisboa Manuelina e a Formação de Modelos Urbanísticos da Epoca Moderna, 1495-1521, (Lisboa: Instituições Portuguesas -- UNL-Universidade Nova de Lisboa).
- Gutkind, E. (1965) International History of City Development Volume 3, Urban Development in Southern Europe: Spain and Portugal (New York, Free Press).
- Higgs, D. (1999) Queer Sites : Gay Urban Histories Since 1600 (London ; New York: Routledge).
- Kagan, R. (2000) Urban Images of the Hispanic World 1493-1793 (New Haven, Yale University Press).
- Kostof, S. (1991) The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History (London,Thames and Hudson).
- Rossa, W. (1998) Beyond Baixa: Signs of Urban Planning in Eighteenth Century Lisbon (Lisbon, Instituto Portugues do Patrimonio Architectonico).
- Rossi. A. (1982) The Architecture of the City (Cambridge Mass., MIT Press).
- Rykwert, J. (1976) The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World (London, Faber and Faber).
- Saraiva, A. J. (1956) A Inquisição Portuguesa (Lisboa, Europa América).
- Teixeira, M. C. and Valla, M. (1999) O Urbanismo Português : Séculos XIII-XVIII : Portugal-Brasil (Lisboa, Livros Horizonte).
- Viscentini, M.A. (2008) "Festivals of State: the Sceneography of Power in late Renaissance and Baroque Venice", in: S. Bonnemaïson and C. Macy (Eds) Festival Architecture (London, Routledge, 74-112).
- Voltaire (1759) Candid, or All for the Best (London, J. Nourse).
- Zucker, P. (1959) Town and Square from the Agora to the Village Green (New York, Columbia University Press).