



## The 1755 Great Lisbon Earthquake, 270 years later: A unique event in a cryptic plate boundary



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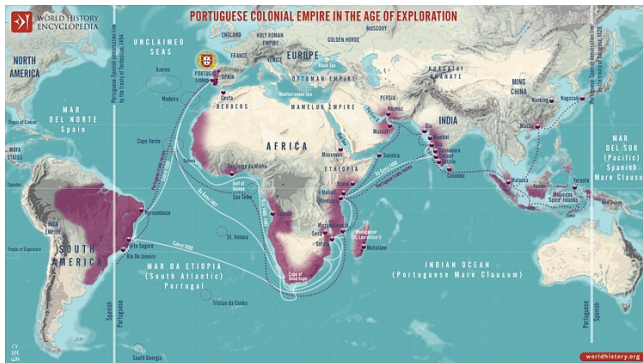
# Part I

## The birth of modern Seismology



# Lisbon in 1755: A city of opulence

## Portugal in the age of explorations



15th century (Ceuta 1415) – 20th century (Macau 1999)  
(Greatest extent in 1820)

### Economic and cultural richness



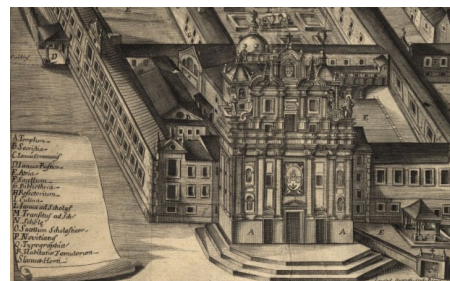
Lisbon, 1752

### Architectural splendor



“Águas Livres” aqueduct (1731-1799)

### Counter-reform deeply religious culture



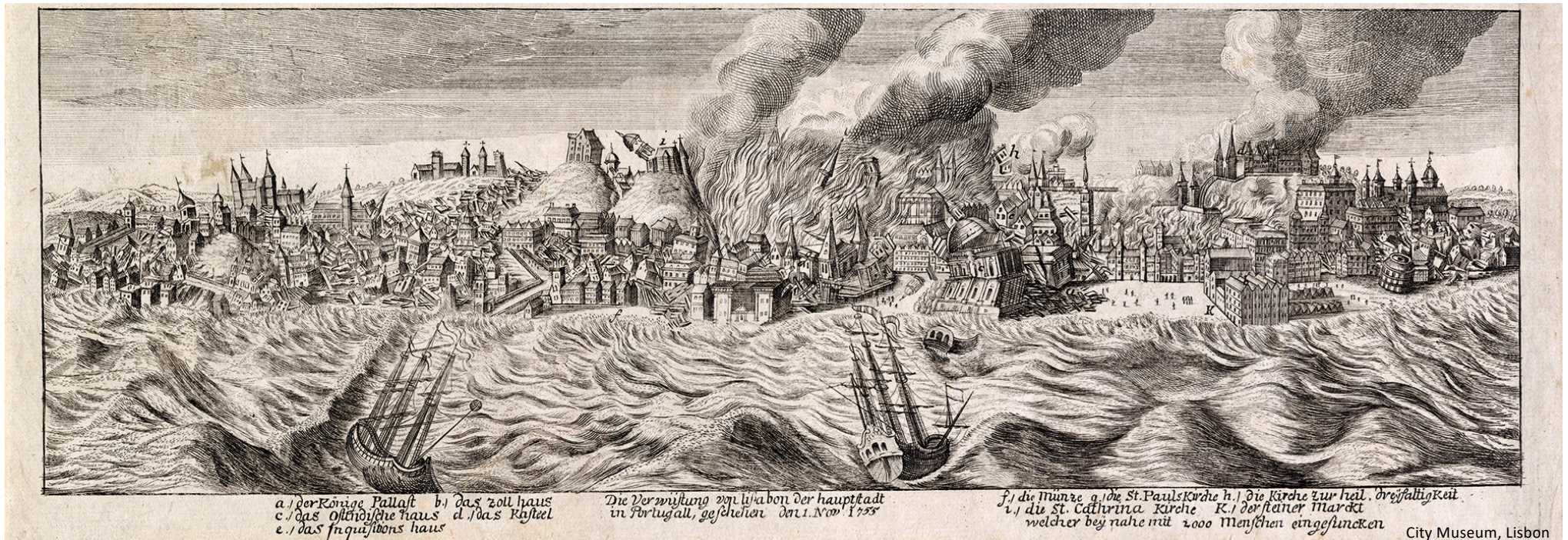
The university forbade "... any conclusions contrary to the Aristotelian system ... such as those of Descartes, Newton, ..." (1746)



Execution of criminals convicted by the Inquisition,  
18th century, City Museum, Lisbon



# November 1st, 1755: The great Lisbon earthquake



## Ground shaking

All Saints day, many in houses and churches.  
~9h40, 7-15 min, 2-3 moments of shaking  
">1/3 of houses remain habitable"  
"1/10 of houses are levelled to the ground"  
(Moreira de Mendonça)

## Fires

House stoves, church candles.  
Many wood buildings.  
Deadly for many under rubble.  
People rush to the riverside.

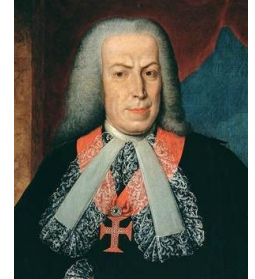
## Tsunami

Inundates downtown, ships in the river.  
"Water level rises for 5 min, then falls, repeats for 3x."  
Sea level returns to normal at ~14h  
+ Many aftershocks... (~11h, 10 years...)



# Emergency Management

Marquês do Pombal  
(1699-1782)  
(PM: 1756-1777)



- “First” earthquake disaster in which the state takes the responsibility of organizing the emergency response.
- “Take care of the living, bury the dead.”
- Search & rescue.
- Military help from out of Lisbon.
- Centralized food distribution.
- Strong law enforcement.
- Prevent people from leaving the city.
- Temporary shelter.
- Rebuilding of Lisbon.

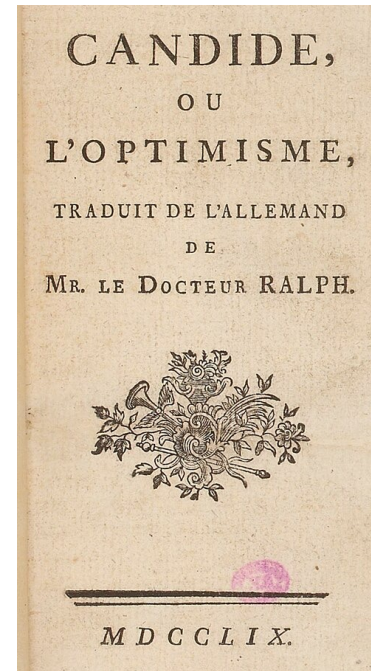
# Theological & Philosophical

## Divine punishment



João Glama Ströberle (1756)  
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

## A benevolent God?



Voltaire (1759)

A natural disaster,  
but with human  
responsibility.

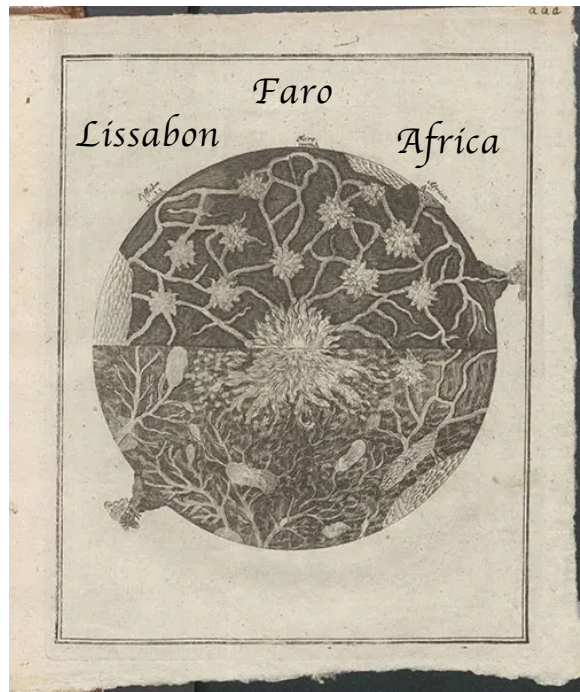
*"If the residents of  
this large city had  
been more evenly  
dispersed and less  
densely housed, the  
losses would have been  
fewer or perhaps none  
at all"*

Rousseau to Voltaire (1756)



# Scientific

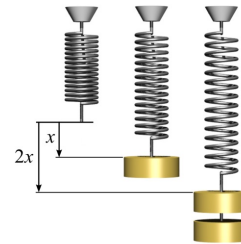
## The inner Earth



Ruhlen (1756), Linda Hall Library

## Elasticity (Hooke, 1676)

$$F = -kx$$

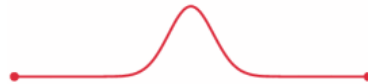


## Sound & Acoustics

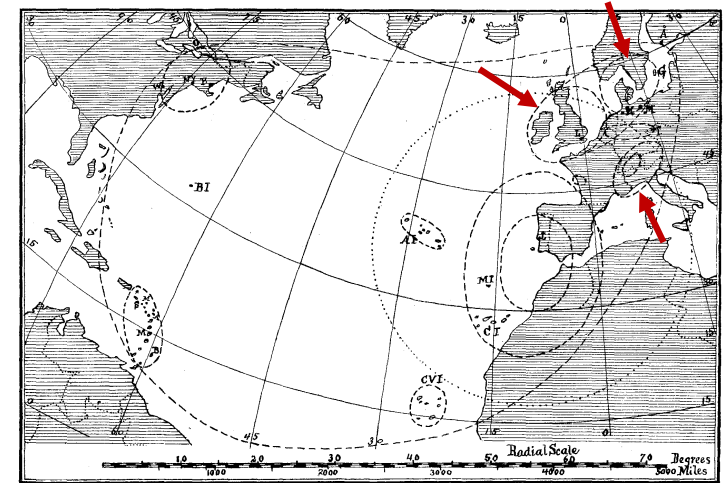
Mersenne 1640: Measured speed of sound  
Newton 1687: Motion through resisting mediums

## 1D Wave equation (D'Alembert, 1747)

$$\frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial t^2} = c^2 \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial x^2}$$

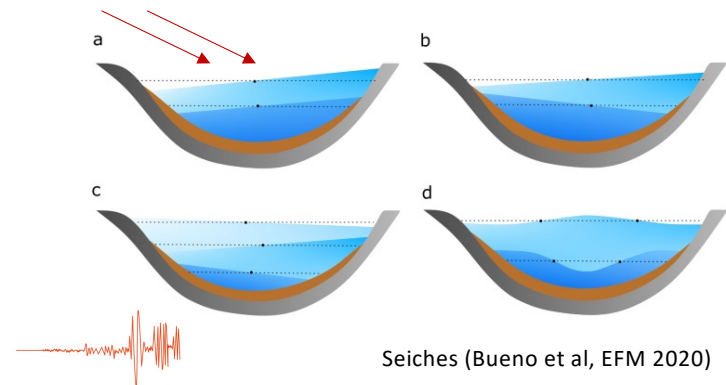


## The "motion of the Earth" reaches far from the source (Kant, 1756 a,b,c)



The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755

Reid, BSSA 1914



Seiches (Bueno et al, EFM 2020)

“Conjectures concerning the cause, and observations upon the phaenomena, of earthquakes; particularly of that great earthquake of the first of November 1755, which proved so fatal to the city of Lisbon, and whose effects were felt as far as Africa, and more or less throughout almost all Europe”

John Michell (Philosophical Transactions, 1760)



John Michell (1724-1793)

“Father of Seismology & Magnetometry”

## Seismic waves

“... earthquakes have their origin underground...”

“... the cause (...) is subterranean fires...”

Seismically active regions.

Volcanoes are seismically active regions.

Earth motion:

- 1) “Tremulous” (shaking), near-field.
- 2) “Propagated by waves”, far-field.

these extraordinary motions. The cause I mean is subterranean fires. These fires, if a large quantity of water should be let out upon them suddenly, may produce a vapour, whose quantity and elastic force may be fully sufficient for that purpose. The principal facts, from which I would prove, that these fires are the real cause of earthquakes, are as follow.

6. *Firstly*, The same places are subject to returns of earthquakes, not only at small intervals for some time after any considerable one has happened, but also at greater intervals of some ages.

9. *Secondly*, Those places that are in the neighbourhood of burning mountains, are always subject to frequent earthquakes; and the eruptions of those mountains, when violent, are generally attended with them.

11. *Thirdly*, The motion of the earth in earthquakes is partly tremulous, and partly propagated by waves, which succeed one another sometimes at larger and sometimes at smaller distances; and this latter motion is generally propagated much farther than the former.

15. *Fourthly*, It is observed in places, which are subject to frequent earthquakes, that they generally come to one and the same place, from the same point of the compass. I may add also, that the velocity, with which they proceed, (as far as one can collect it from the accounts of them) is the same; but the velocity of the earthquakes of different countries is very different.

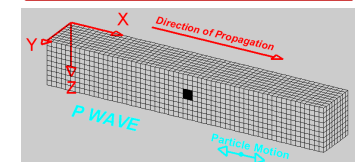
21. *Fifthly*, The great Lisbon earthquake has been succeeded by several local ones since, the extent of which has been much less.

weight of the superincumbent matter, this compression must be propagated on account of the elasticity of the earth, in the same manner as a pulse is propagated through the air; and again the materials immediately over the cavity, restoring themselves beyond their natural bounds, a dilatation will succeed to the compression; and these two following each other alternately, for some time, a vibratory motion will be produced at the surface of the earth. If these alter-

Source, ray direction.  
Seismic velocity.

Aftershocks.

“... this compression must be propagated on account of the elasticity of the Earth, ...”





“Conjectures concerning the cause, and observations upon the phaenomena, of earthquakes; particularly of that great earthquake of the first of November 1755, which proved so fatal to the city of Lisbon, and whose effects were felt as far as Africa, and more or less throughout almost all Europe”

John Michell (Philosophical Transactions, 1760)

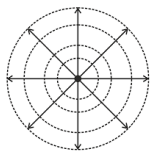


John Michell (1724-1793)

“Father of Seismology & Magnetometry”

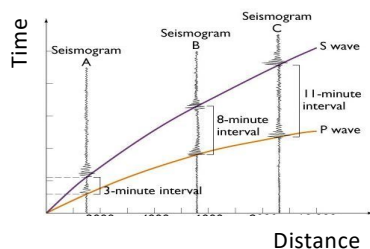
## Earthquake location

### 1. Incoming directions



### 2. Arrival times

### 3. $t_{\text{tsunami}} - t_{\text{seismic}}$



91. *First*, The different directions, in which it arrives at several distant places: if lines be drawn in these directions, the place of their common intersection must be nearly the place sought: but this is liable to great difficulties; for there must necessarily be great uncertainty in observations, which cannot, at

92. *Secondly*, We may form some judgment concerning the place of the origin of a particular earthquake, from the time of its arrival at different places; but this also is liable to great difficulties. In both these methods, however, we may come to a much greater degree of exactness, by taking a medium amongst a variety of accounts, as they are related by different observers. But,

93. *Thirdly*, We may come to the greatest degree of exactness in those cases, where earthquakes have their source from under the ocean; for, in these instances, the proportional distance of different places from that source may be very nearly ascertained, by the interval between the earthquake and the succeeding wave: and this is the more to be depended on, as people are much less likely to be mistaken in determining the time between two events, which follow one another at a small interval, than in observing the precise time of the happening of some single event.

	d	$t_{\text{seis}}$	$t_{\text{tsu}}$
	Half deg.	Min.	Min.
Lisbon *	2	3	12
Oporto *	3	5	
Ayamonte	6		53
Cadiz	9	12	82
Madrid	9	11	
Gibraltar	11	18	
Madeira	19	25	152
Mountbay	20		267
Plymouth	21		360
Portsmouth	23	29	
Kingfale	23		290
Swansea	24		530
The Hague	30	32	
Lochnes	33	66	
Antigua	98		565
Barbadoes	101		485

100. at the distance of three miles from Lisbon, to the height of fifty or sixty feet. The true reason of this disproportion, seems to be the difference in the depth of the water; for, in every instance in the above table, the time will be found to be proportionably shorter or longer, as the water through which the wave passed was \* deeper or shallower. Thus the

100. If we would inquire into the depth, at which the cause lies, that occasions any particular earthquake, I know of no method of determining it, which does not require observations not yet to be had; but if such could be procured, and they were made with sufficient accuracy, I think some kind of guess might be formed concerning it: for,

Earthquake location:  
“... I compute, at a distance of about a degree of a great circle from Lisbon, and a degree and a half from Oporto”,

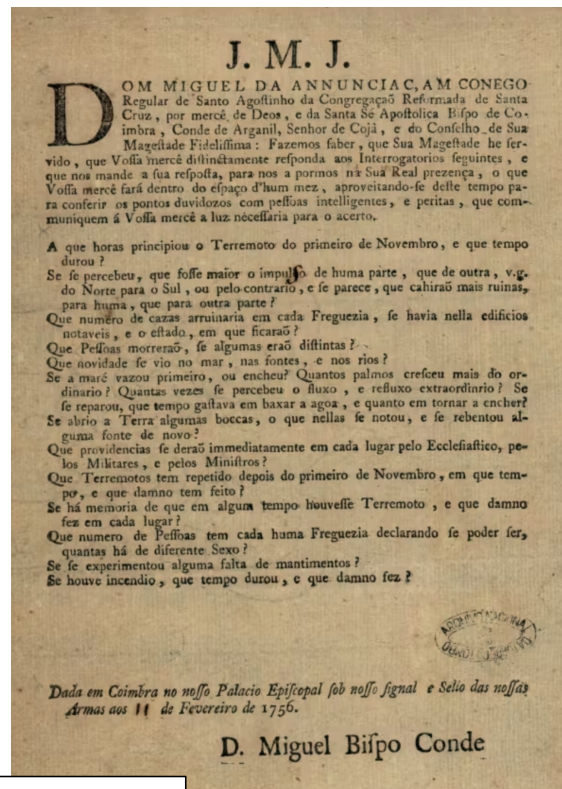
Tsunami speed depends on water depth.

“... [as to] the depth (...) I know of no method of determining it, ...”



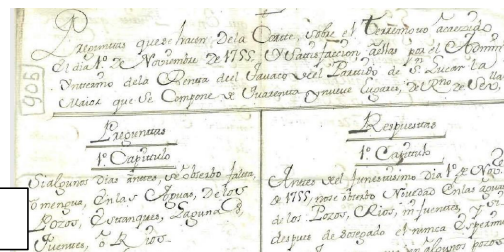
# “Macroseismic” questionnaire

“... has a truly scientific character,  
quite unusual for the time”  
Montessus de Balore (early 20th century)



Portugal

1. At what time did the earthquake begin on November 1st, and how long did it last? **[Time, duration of shaking]**
  2. Did you perceive the shock to be greater from one direction to the other? E.g., from north to south, or on the contrary, did more buildings seem to fall to one side or the other? **[Directionality]**
  3. How many buildings were ruined in each parish, if any notable buildings were among them, and in what state did they remain? **[Damage]**
  4. How many people died, and were any of them distinguished? **[Fatalities]**
  5. What unusual phenomena were observed in the sea, springs, and rivers? **[Hydrological effects]**
  6. Did the sea rise or fall first, how many hands did it rise above normal, how many times did you notice the extraordinary rise or fall, and did you note how long it took for the water to fall and rise? **[Tsunami polarity, amplitude, period, nr of waves]**
  7. Did the earth open up in some places, what was noticed there, and did any new springs burst forth? **[Surface “rupture”]**
  8. What measures were immediately taken in each place by the clergy, the military, and the ministers? **[Emergency response]**
  9. What earthquakes have repeated since the first of November, at what time, and what damage have they done? **[Aftershocks]**
  10. Have there been any other earthquake in living memory and what damage did they cause in each place? **[Background seismicity]**
  11. How many people are there in each parish, stating, if possible, how many of each gender? **[Demography]**
  12. Has there been shortage of food? **[Supplies]**
  13. If fire broke out, how long did it last and what damage did it cause? **[Fire duration and damage]**
- Extra. Did any damage occur in the 1755 earthquake, and if so, what was it, and has it been repaired? **[Reconstruction]**



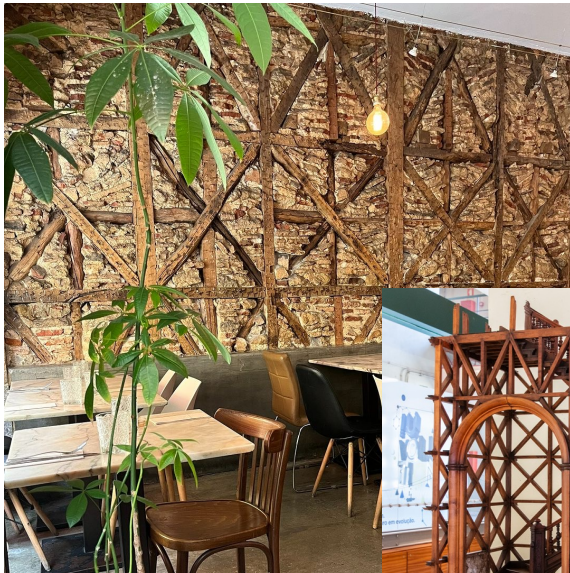
Spain

Currently archived at Torre do Tombo.  
(Lost for the Algarve and Lower Tagus Valley.)

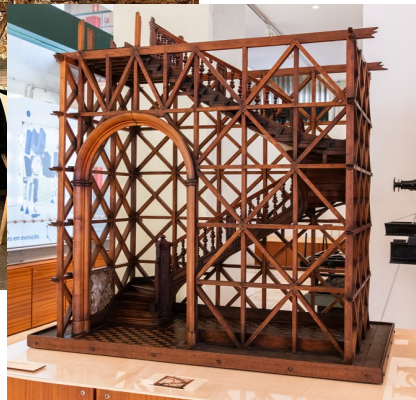


# Engineering & City Planning

## “Gaiola Pombalina” & anti-fire walls



Café do Rio, Praça do Comércio



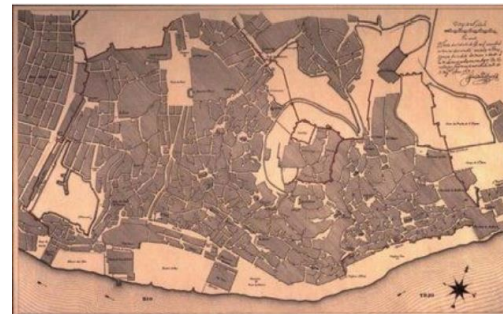
Museu do Técnico

## City Planning

Before



After



iaga-iaspei-2025.org

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IASPEI/AGA IAGA / IASPEI Joint Scientific Meeting 2025 Destination Contacts

## Quake Museum – 50% Discount

- Valid for each registered delegate for [Quake Museum](#) tickets between 28/8 and 2/9
- Use code **IAGAIASPEI25**
- Booking your visit in advance is highly recommended
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[Book your Quake Museum tickets](#)

**Quake – Lisbon Earthquake**

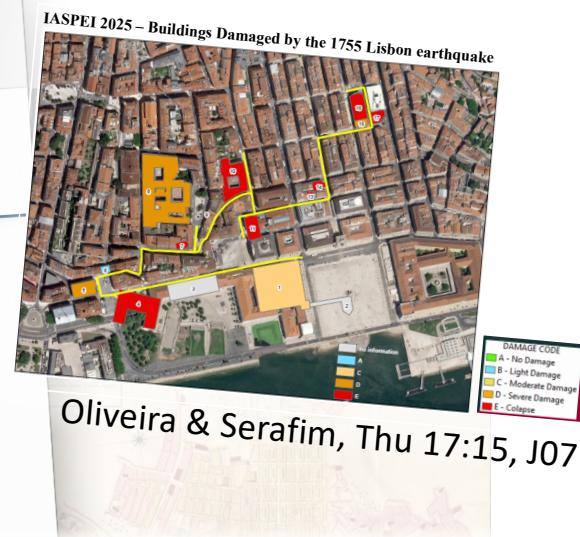
[lisbonquake.com](http://lisbonquake.com)

Discover the science and history of earthquakes

**QUAKE**

LISBON EARTHQUAKE MUSEUM

Quake - Educationa...



Café do Rio, Praça do Comércio



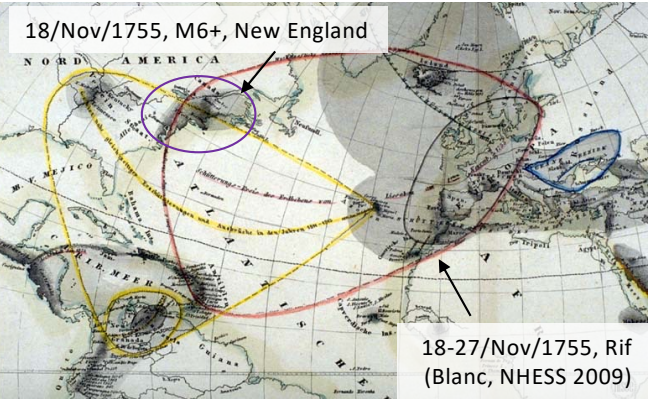


## Part II

# The quest for the source

# Seismic Intensities

## Felt area (1849-52)



NISEE

AHEAD (Aug/2025)

Date	Epicentral area	Info
1755-02-28	Sarthe	11
1755-08-01 06:40		11
1755-08-07	Vallee De La Loire	11
1755-08-24 03	Mons TO	11
1755-08-28	Prail	11
1755-10-01	Niedersachsen, Nordsee/O	11
1755-10-15	CLUSE DE CHAMBERY (CHAMBERY)	11
1755-11-01	Penae	11
1755-11-01 09:30	LIBRAIR	11
1755-11-01 17	Antagapendente	11
1755-11-02 34	La Bièvre	11
1755-11-02 14:30	Ausich	11
1755-11-04 31	W. Cabo San Vicente	11
1755-11-05	W. Cabo San Vicente	11
1755-11-15 02	Sangreosa NA	11
1755-11-16 08:30	Tomecamp CO	11
1755-11-27 11	Mar de Alborán	11
1755-12-08	Donauskarte	11
1755-12-08 13:45	Brig-Naters	11
1755-12-30	La Lucle	11
1755-12-31 03	Brig-Naters	11
1755-12-36 16	Dion	11
1755-12-28 23:55	Hauter-Fignes	11
1755-12-27	Dion	11
1755-12-27 03	[Dion]	11
1755-12-27 03	COMPLÉNT (PRADES)	11
1755-12-27 04:15	COMPLÉNT (PRADES)	11
1755-12-27 09	Stalberg-Vikt	11
1755-12-27 13:30	Brig-Naters	11
1755-12-30	Brig-Naters	11

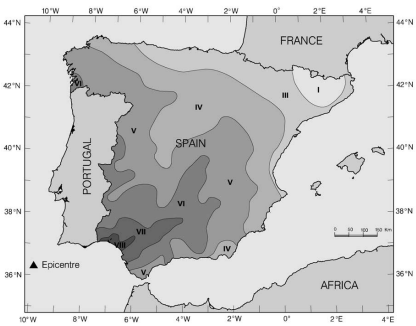
4 earthquakes in Aug/1755  
2 earthquakes in Oct/1755  
10 earthquakes in Nov/1755  
13 earthquakes in Dec/1755

- Revision needed.
- Complex very far and near fields.

## Intensities

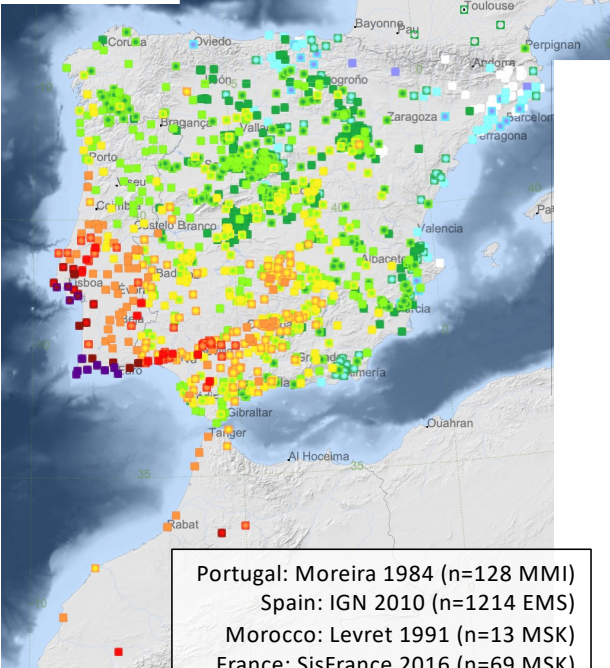


Pereira de Sousa (1932)  
(n=500+ Rossi-Forel)



Martinez Solares & Lopez Arroyo (2004)

## AHEAD

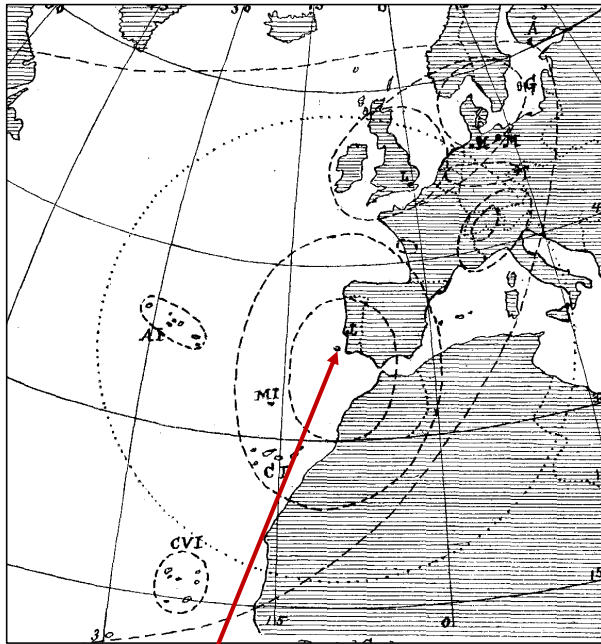




# Macroseismic location

“Somewhere” in the SWIM plate boundary.

Reid (1914)



“... only for convenience”

Machado (1966)

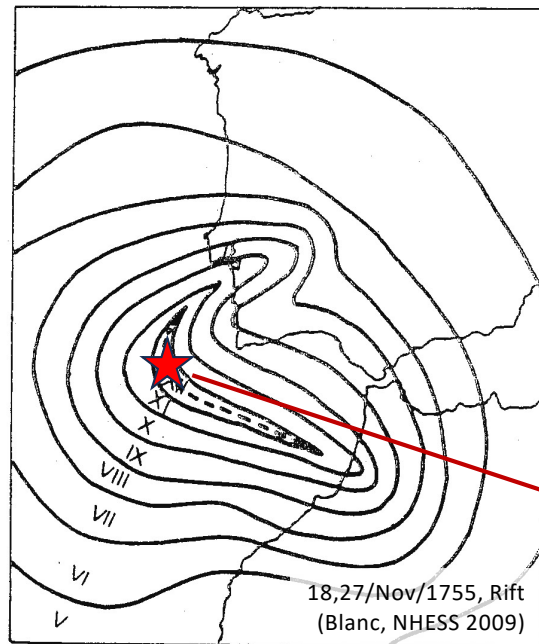
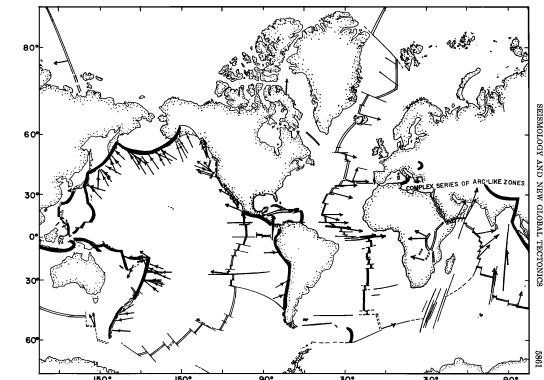
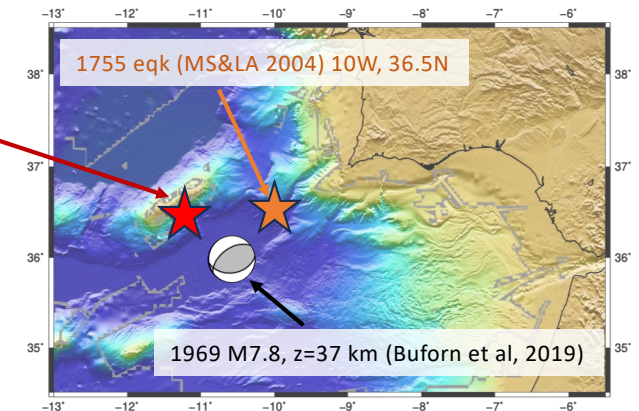


Plate tectonics (1960s)



Isacks, JGR 1968

1969 M7.8 earthquake



# Magnitude

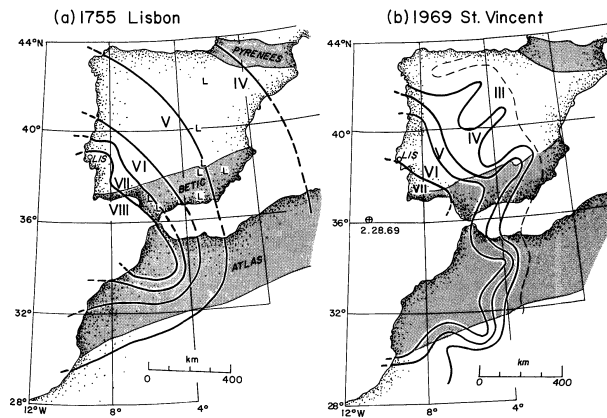
Gutenberg and Richter (1949)  
M 8.75 – 9

“... swinging of suspended objects, and of seiches, indicate that the surface waves were very large over the whole of western Europe (Reid 1914)” + perceptibility radius of 2500 km

## SEISMICITY OF THE EARTH AND ASSOCIATED PHENOMENA

By B. GUTENBERG and C. F. RICHTER  
SEISMOLOGICAL LABORATORY, CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

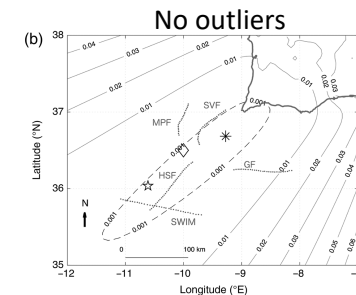
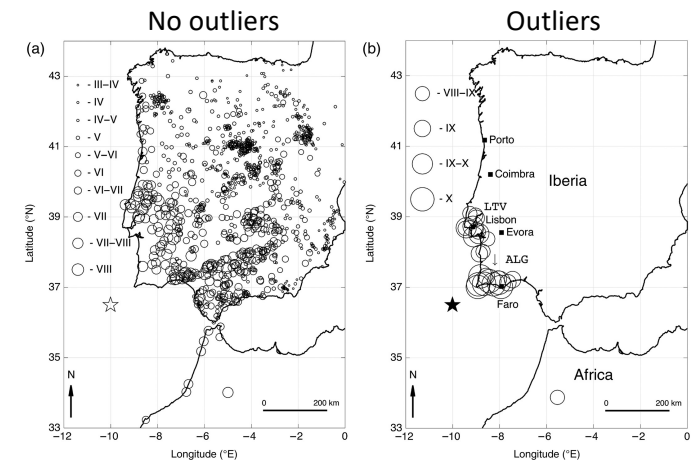
magnitude between  $8\frac{1}{4}$  and  $8\frac{1}{2}$ . A more serious question relates to the magnitude of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, since the phenomena of swinging of suspended objects, and of seiches indicate that the surface waves were very large over the whole of western Europe (Reid, 1914). This, combined with the enormous area perceptibly shaken, (regardless of the probability that shocks occurred with several different epicenters) suggests a magnitude between  $8\frac{3}{4}$  and 9. A shock of magnitude over 10 should theoretically be perceptible in scattered areas over the whole earth; alleged historical accounts of such events probably rest on a confusion of different shocks occurring near the same time. In recent years such statements may refer to instrumental recordings.



Martinez Solares & Lopez Arroyo  
(JS 2004)  
M 8.5 ± 0.33

Strong trade-off: location vs magnitude.

Fonseca (BSSA 2020)  
(partial) M 7.7 ± 0.5

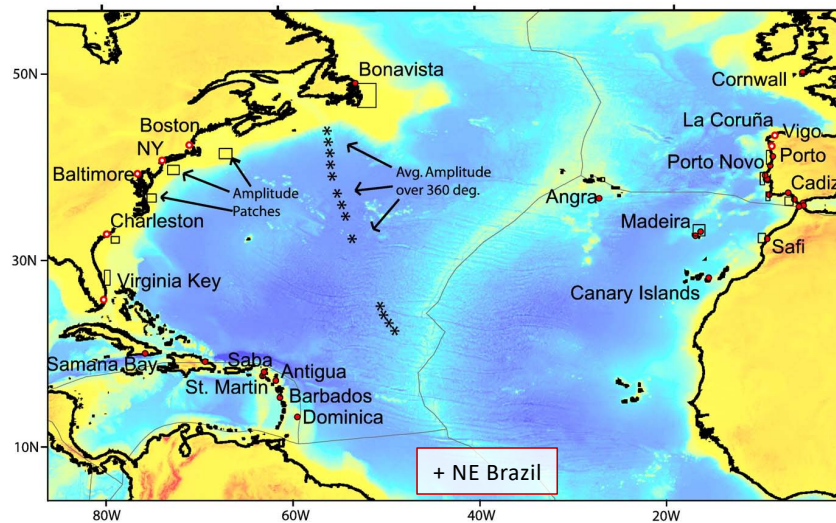




# Trans-Atlantic tsunami

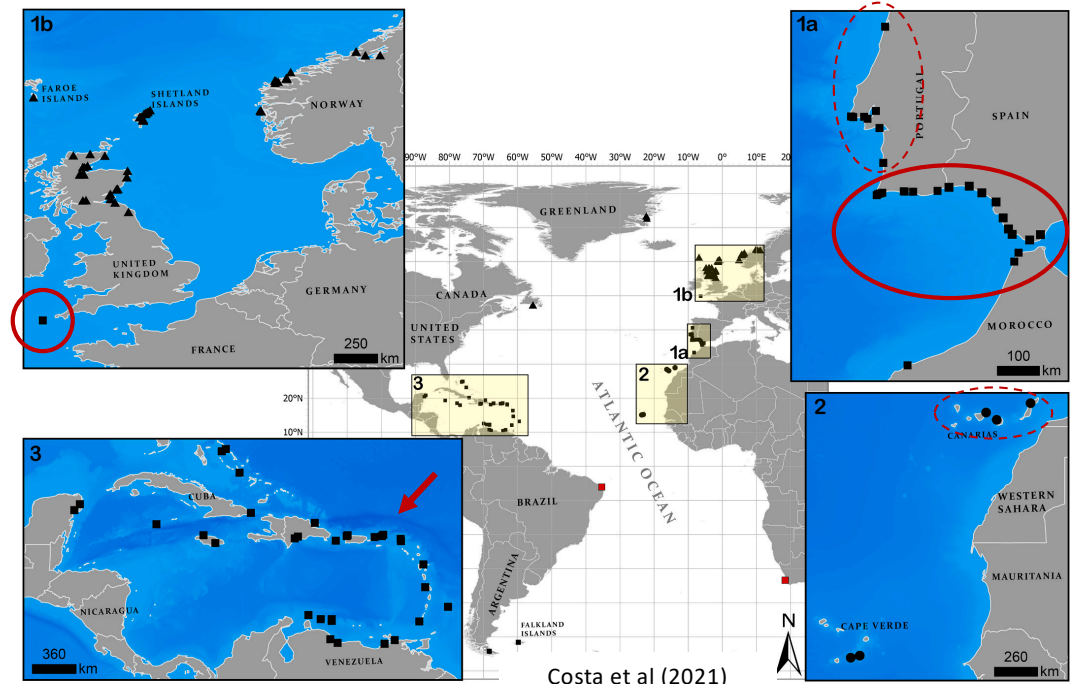
- Historical records around the N Atlantic.
- Tsunami deposits in SW Iberia, + some further.

Run-up historical reports



Barkan et al (2009)

Tsunami deposits

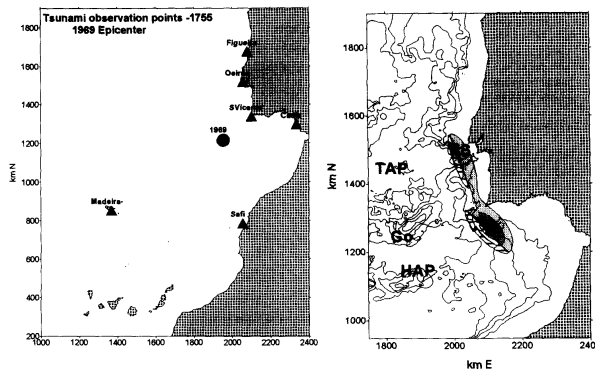


Costa et al (2021)

# Which fault(s)?

Possibly a multiple fault rupture.

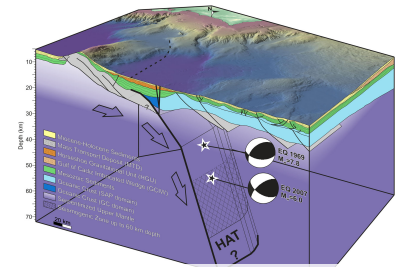
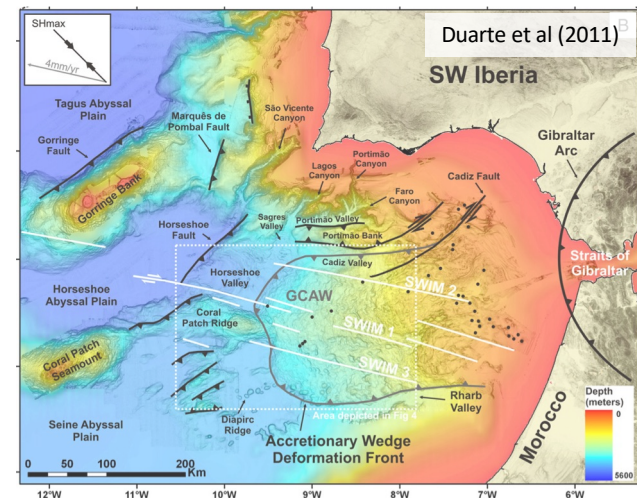
## Tsunami arrival times & heights



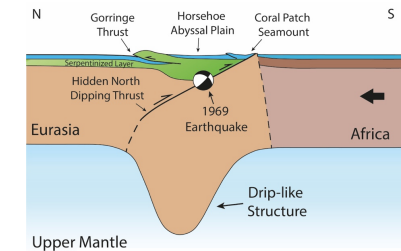
Location	Coordinates	Wave height (m)	Travel time (min) and estimated error
Portuguese west coast			
Porto	8.18° W, 41.15° N	1	—
Figueira da Foz	8.88° W, 40.14° N	—	45–50
Lisboa (Oeiras)	9.08° W, 38.73° N	5	25 (estimated error±10)
Cabo S Vicente	8.99° W, 37.00° N	> 10	16 (estimated error±7)
Gulf of Cadiz			
Cadiz	6.30° W, 36.05° N	15	78 (estimated error±15)
Huelva	6.93° W, 37.25° N	—	45 (estimated error±10)
Ceuta	5.32° W, 35.88° N	2	—
Gibraltar	5.35° W, 36.15° N	2	—
Madeira Islands			
Madeira	16.88° W, 32.63° N	4	90 (estimated error±15)
Porto Santo	16.16° W, 33.06° N	—	60 (estimated error±15)
Cornwall (UK)			
Penzance	5.53° W, 51.52° N	2	315
Newlyn	15.56° W, 50.10° N	—	279
Plymouth	4.15° W, 50.31° N	—	390
Morocco			
Safi	9.33° W, 32.30° N	—	26–34 (estimated error±20)

? (Blanc 2008)

## Marine geophysics: The offshore faults



Martinez-Loriente et al (2021)



Duarte et al (2025)

## Single faults:

- Gorringe (Machado 1966)
- Marquês de Pombal (Zitellini et al, 1999)
- Gibraltar arc system (Gutscher, 2006)

## Multiple rupture fault:

- Marquês de Pombal + Guadalquivir (Baptista et al, 2003)
- Marquês de Pombal + Pereira de Sousa (Terrinha et al, 2003)
- Offshore + LTV (Vilanova & Fonseca, 2003)
- Horseshoe + SWIM1 (Rosas et al, 2016)

## Horseshoe plain:

- "Horseshoe plain" (Barkan et al, 2009)
- Horseshoe Abyssal Thrust (Martinez Loriente et al, 2021)
- "Hidden north dipping thrust" (Duarte et al, in press)



# Summary I: The 1755 earthquake

- Historical observations have limited accuracy; revision is needed.
- Reconciling datasets:
  - Macroseismic ground motion:
    - Complexities in the near (local effects) and very far field (other earthquakes).
    - Location: SW Iberia margin plate boundary.
    - Magnitude: M 7.7 (partial) - 8.7.
    - Multiple fault rupture: Suggested by duration (3x, 7-15 min) and complexity of intensities.
  - Tsunami:
    - Complexity in the near field (observational, multiple rupture).
    - Very large tsunami: Very shallow slip (Tohoku-type), low  $v_{rup}$  tsunami earthquake, ...
  - Seiches & swinging of suspended objects throughout Europe:
    - Strong long-period surface waves: Shallow strong earthquake?
  - Marine geophysics:
    - No surface rupture imaged so far by marine geophysics.

## Part III

Beyond the 1755 earthquake

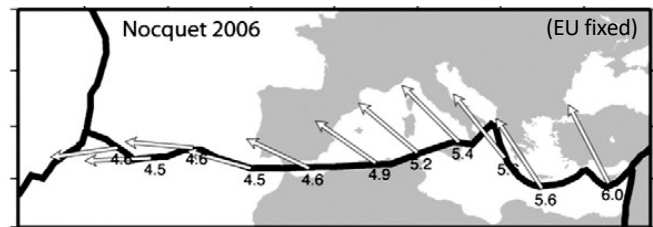
Seismic hazard and risk  
of the SW Iberia plate boundary



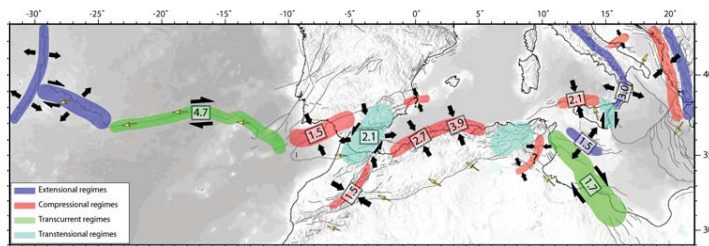
# SW Iberia Plate Boundary

- NW-SE oblique convergence.
- Wide region of deformation.

## Plate convergence

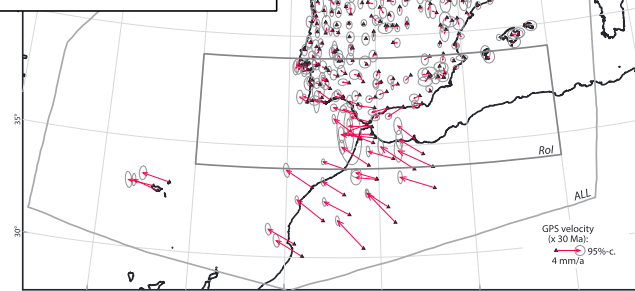


Nocquet et al, 2006



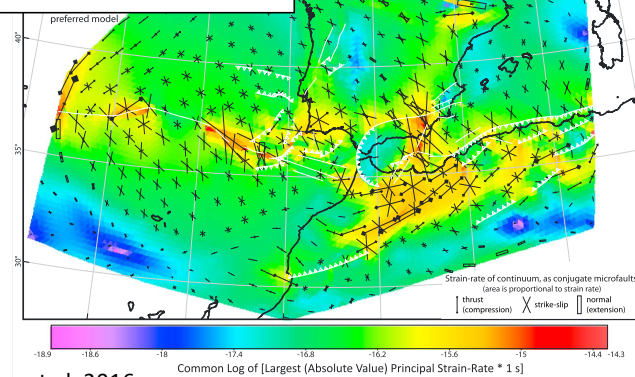
Serpelloni et al, 2007

## GNSS velocities (EU fixed)



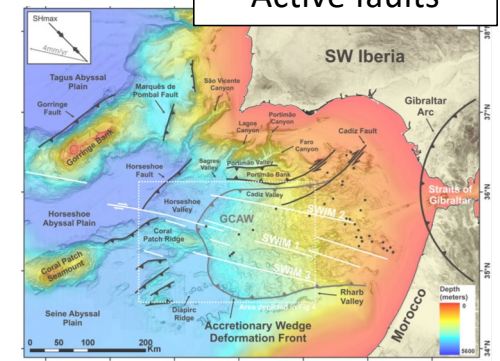
Neres et al, 2016

## Strain rate



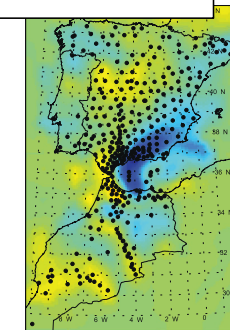
Neres et al, 2016

## Active faults

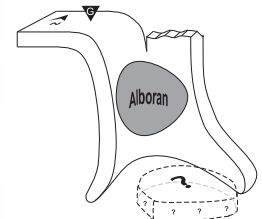


Duarte et al (2011)

## Gibraltar slab



480 km

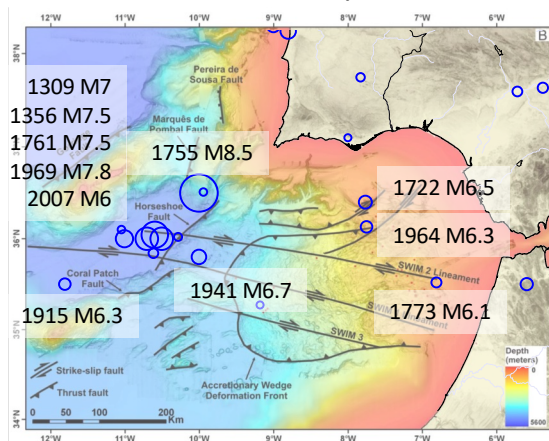


Bezada et al, 2013

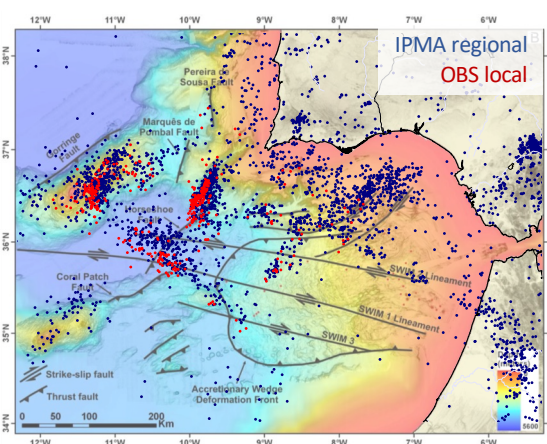
# Seismicity

- Abundant offshore historical & instrumental earthquakes.
- Crustal faults remain mostly silent.
- Deep seismogenic faults (>20 km) remain blind.

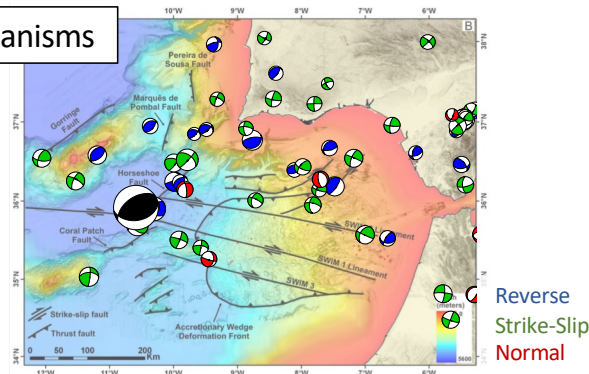
## Historical earthquakes



## Instrumental earthquakes (2007-2024)

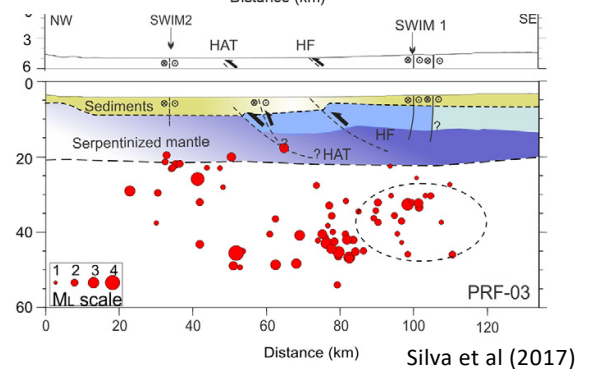
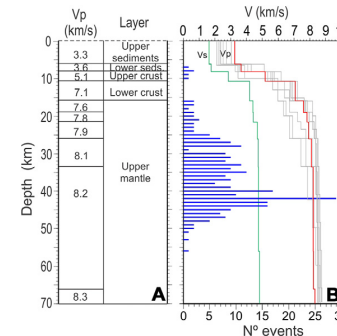
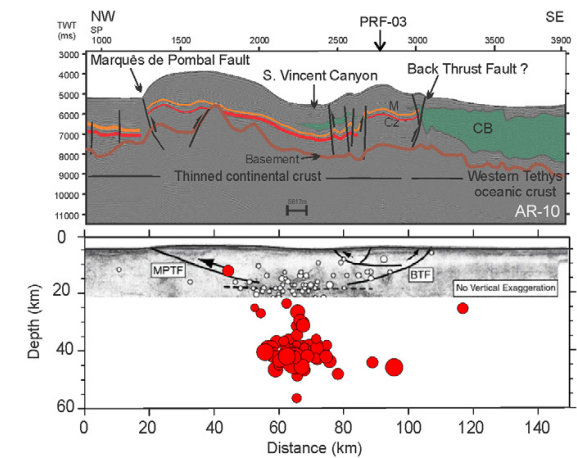


## Focal mechanisms



EDSF, SHEEC, IPMA,  
Custodio et al (2016a,b),  
Duarte et al (2011)

## High-quality OBS locations

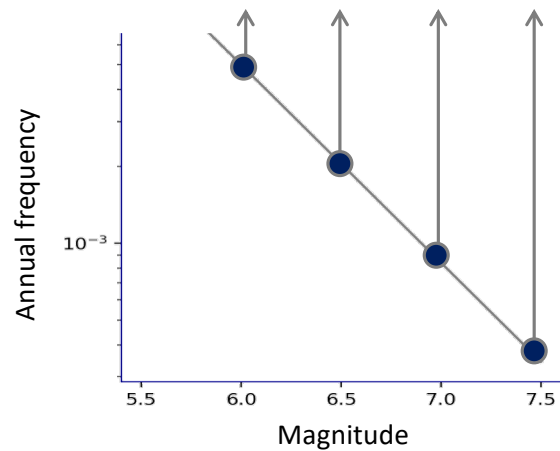




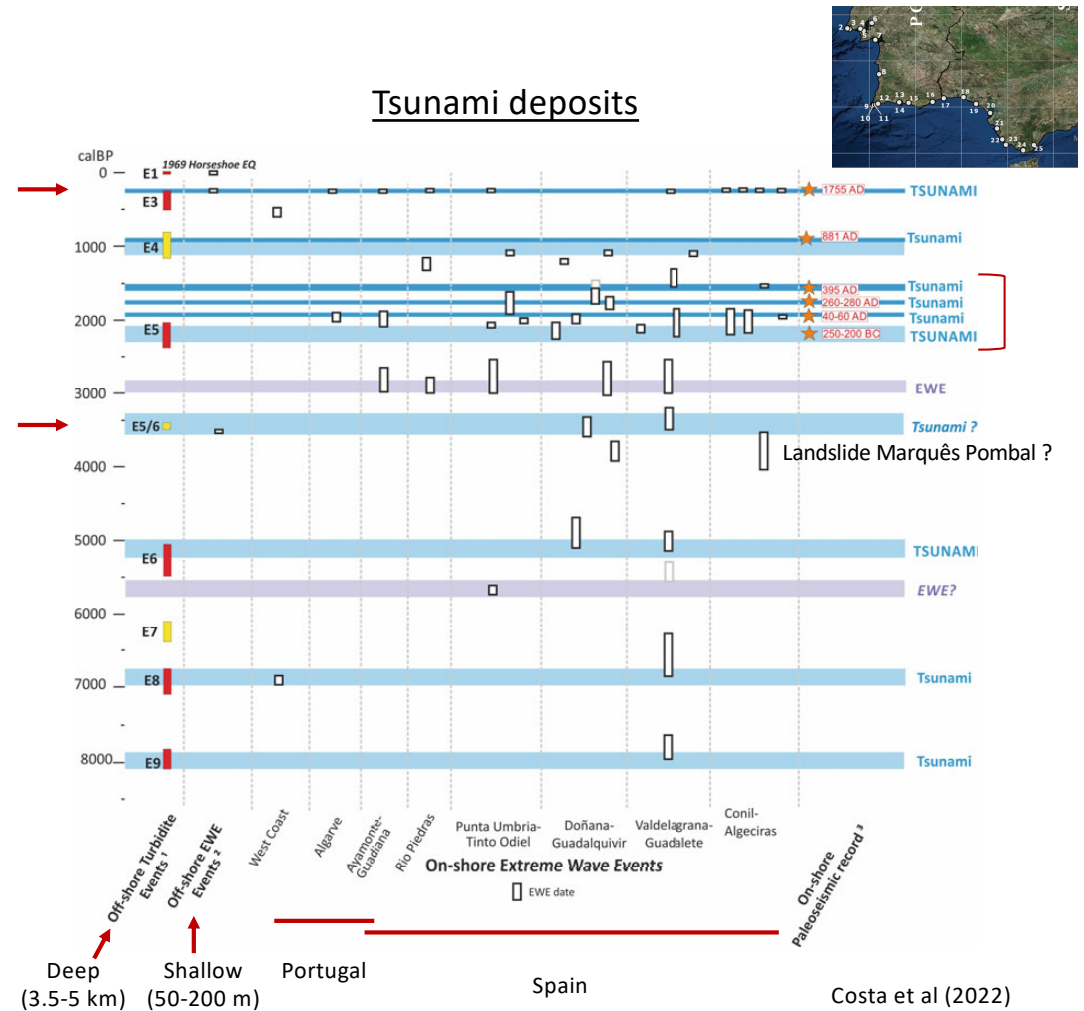
# How often?

Frequency-magnitude recurrence times (years)

Magnitude	6	6.5	7	7.5
Marquês de Pombal	200	488	1192	2909
Horseshoe Fault	789	1927	4703	11476
Gorringe	253	619	1512	3691



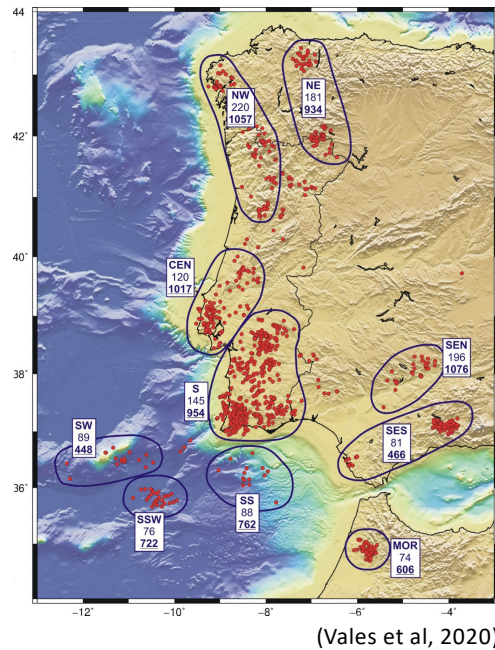
Frequency-magnitude & tsunami deposits: few thousands of years.



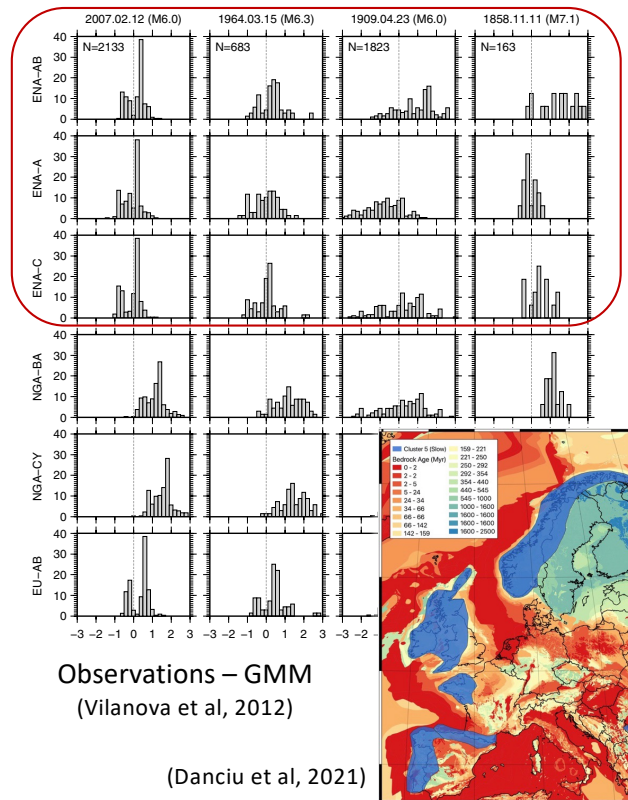
# Ground motion modeling

- Low attenuation in the mainland.
- Large lateral variations of  $Q$ .
- Regional model good! 😊, but lacks data at small  $R$ , high  $M$ .

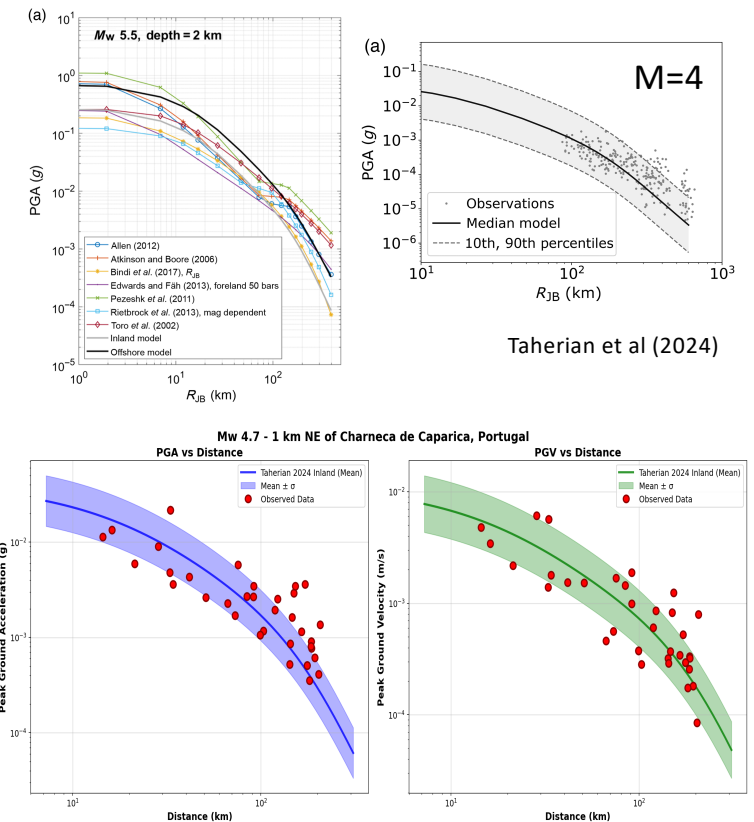
Attenuation (Coda-Q)  
 $Q_0(f=1 \text{ Hz})$  &  $Q_{10}(f=10 \text{ Hz})$



Attenuation (Global GMMs)



Regional ground motion model



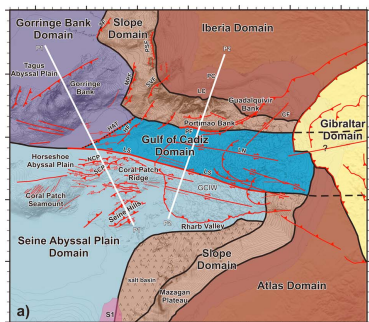


# Physics based modeling

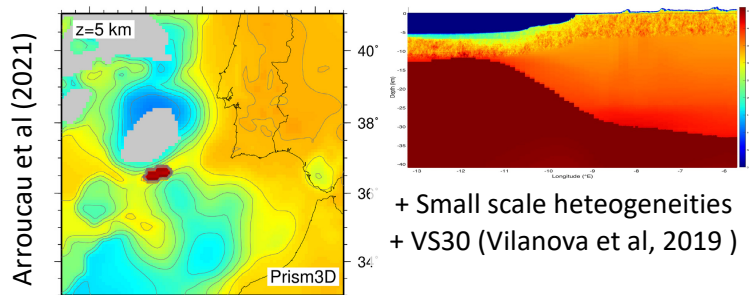
- Lack resolution of large shallow basins.
- GM->MMI ?
- Slip complexities are important.

## Geological domains

Exhumed mantle      Thinned continental      Variscan continental

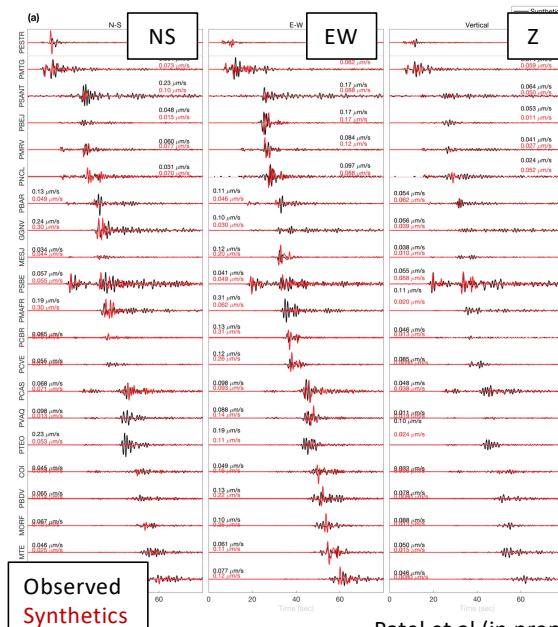
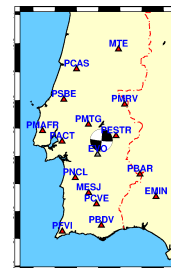


### 3D Seismic structure



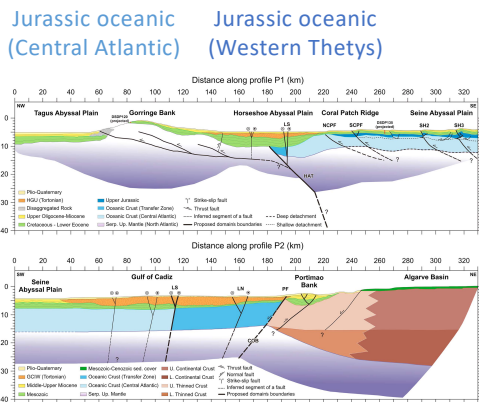
- + Small scale heterogeneities
- + VS30 (Vilanova et al, 2019 )

## Large sedimentary basins

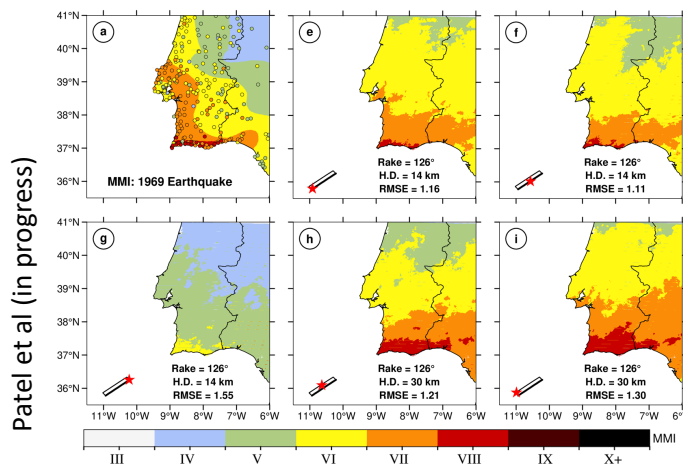


Patel et al (in prep.)

## Martinez Lorient et al (2014)



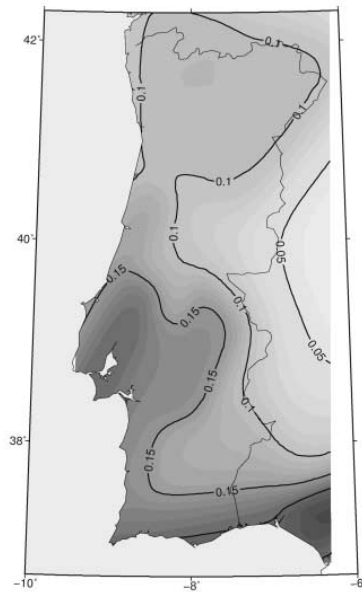
### Source complexity



# Hazard models (10% in 50 years, rock)

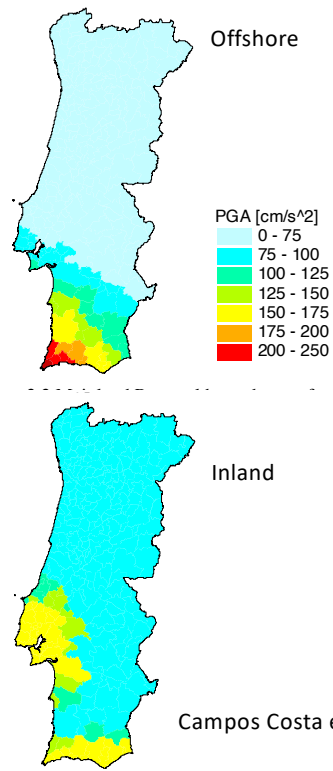
- Highest hazard in the Algarve and LTV.
- Max PGA  $\sim 0.2$  g (10% in 50 years, rock).

PSHA

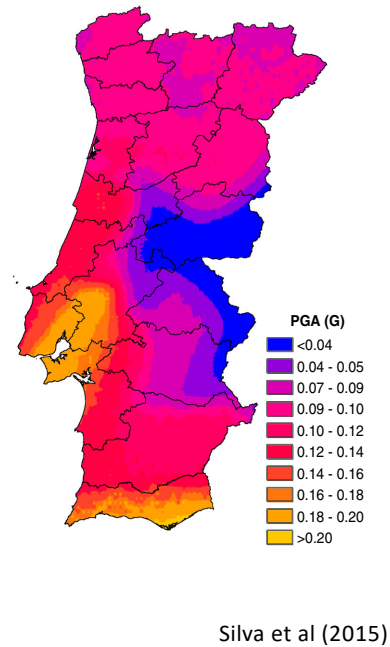


Vilanova & Fonseca (2007)

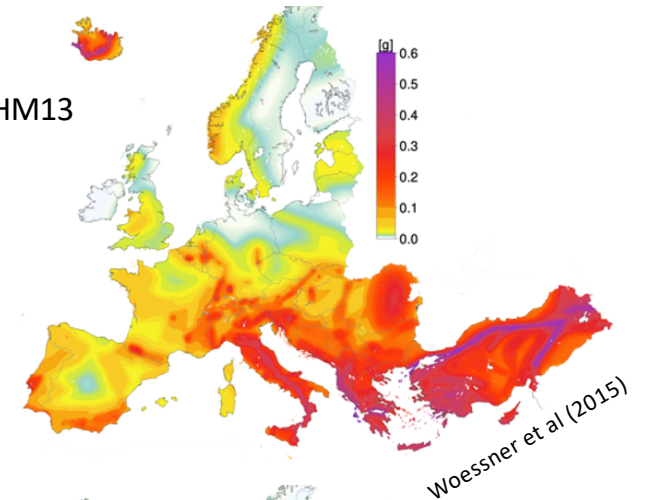
EC8



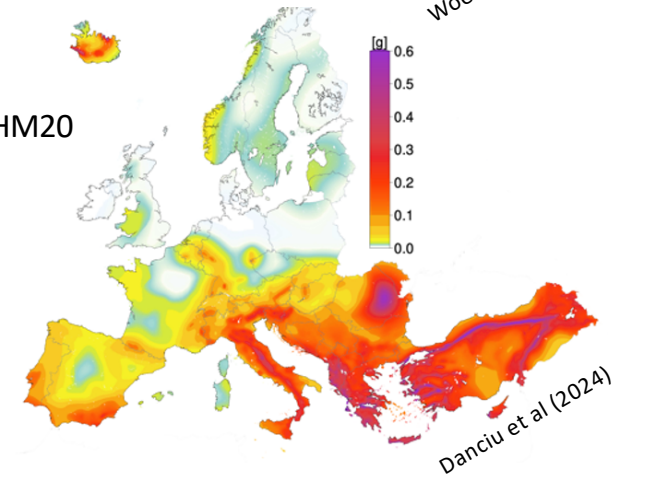
OpenQuake



ESHM13



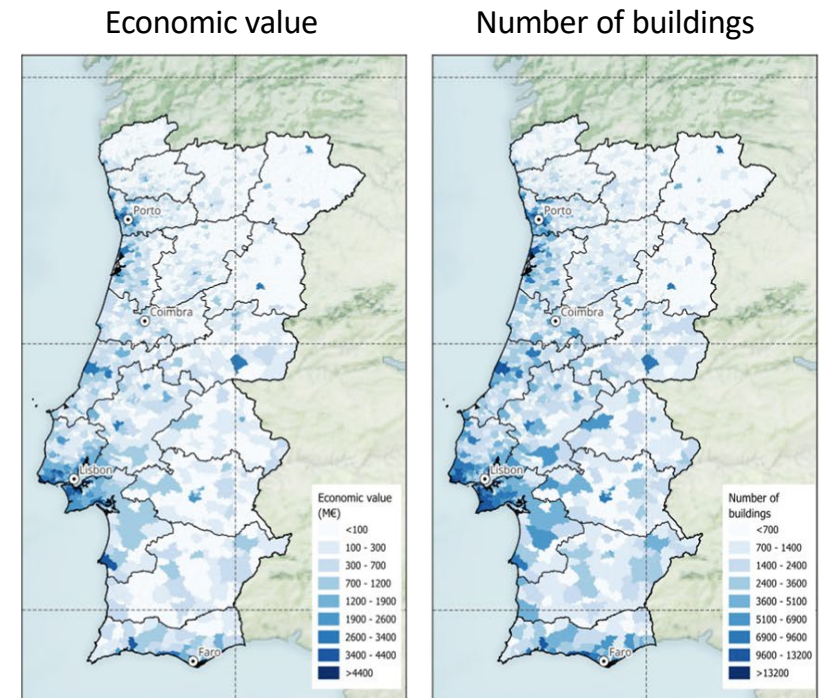
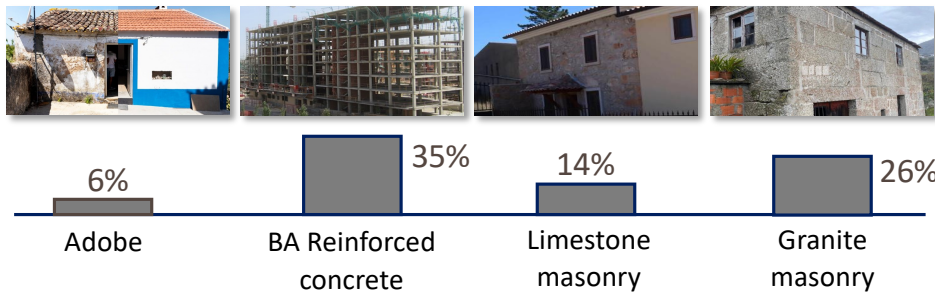
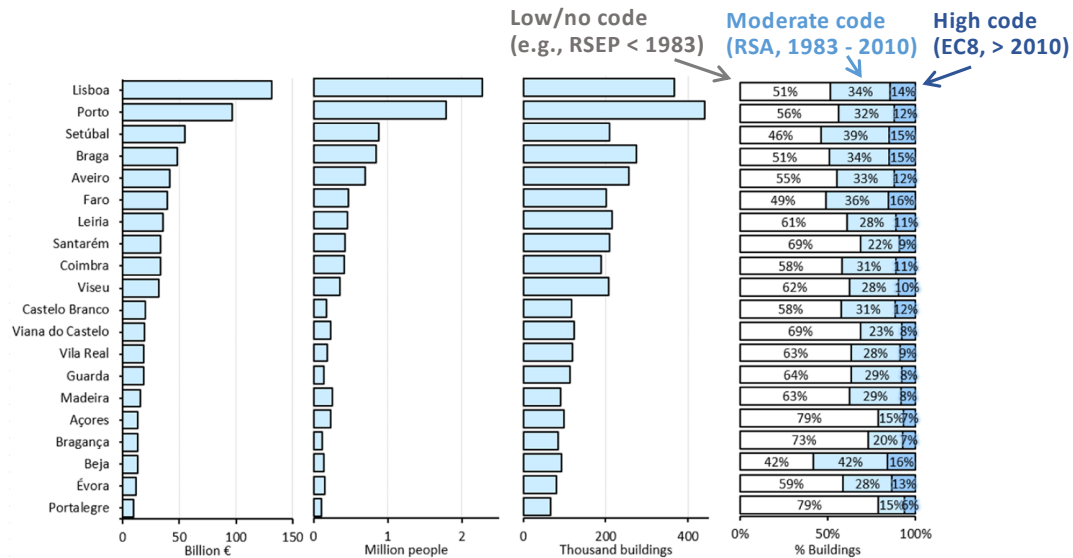
ESHM20



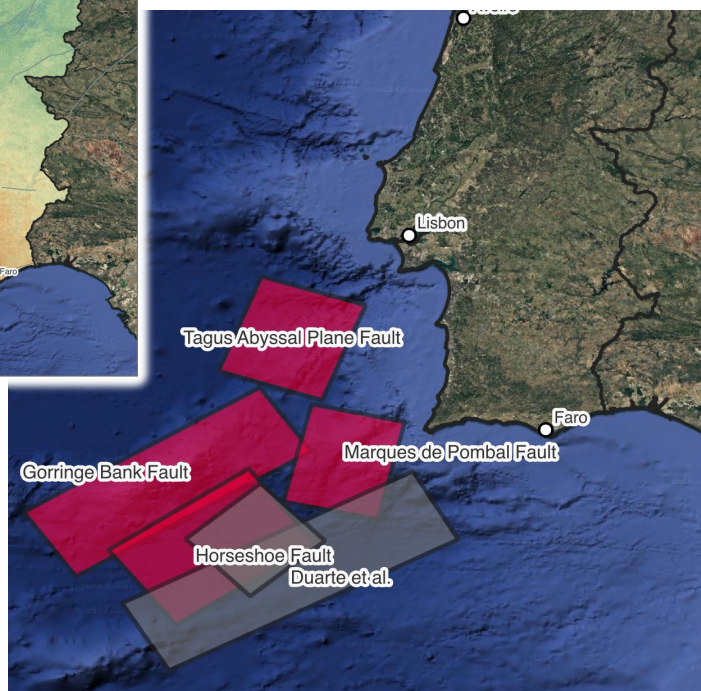
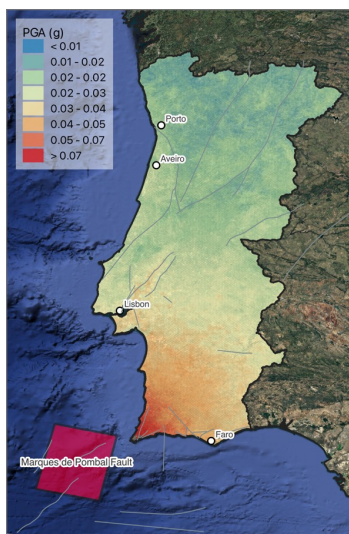


# Built environment

- Highest economic value close to the coast.
- Most houses built before codes.
- Problematic enforcement of codes.



# What if it were today?



## Economic Losses

Fault	M Max	M8.0	M7.5	M7.0	M6.5	M6.0
Marques de Pombal ( $M_{\max} = 7.5$ )	3.1	-	3.1	0.9	0.27	0.08
Ferradura ( $M_{\max} = 7.7$ )	2.7	-	1.8	0.5	0.13	0.03
Planície Abissal do Tejo ( $M_{\max} = 7.5$ )	5.9	-	5.9	2.4	0.80	0.27
Banco de Gorrige ( $M_{\max} = 8.0$ )	7.2	7.2	2.5	0.7	0.18	0.04
Fukao (1973) ( $M_{\max} = 8.0$ )	5.2	5.2	1.8	0.5	0.14	0.03
Duarte et al. (2025) ( $M_{\max} = 8.6$ )	18.0	6.0	2.1	0.7	0.19	0.05
Extreme impact (>5 billion EUR)	High impact (0.5-5 billion EUR)		Moderate impact (0.1-0.5 billion EUR)		Low impact (<0.1 billion EUR)	

## Fatalities

Tipo de falha	M Max	M8.0	M7.5	M7.0	M6.5	M6.0
Marques de Pombal ( $M_{\max} = 7.5$ )	174	-	174	30	2	0
Ferradura ( $M_{\max} = 7.7$ )	172	-	92	16	3	0
Planície Abissal do Tejo ( $M_{\max} = 7.5$ )	416	-	416	102	19	4
Banco de Gorrige ( $M_{\max} = 8.0$ )	530	530	120	18	2	0
Fukao (1973) ( $M_{\max} = 8.0$ )	418	418	93	15	5	1
Duarte et al. (2025) ( $M_{\max} = 8.6$ )	1,885	860	113	21	2	0
Extreme impact (> 1000 fatalities)	High impact (100-1000 fatalities)		Moderate impact (5-100 fatalities)		Low impact (<5 fatalities)	



# Summary II: Hazard of the SW Iberia plate boundary

- Challenges:

- Source:
  - Shallow crustal faults vs deep seismogenic faults.
  - Non-stationarity and fault interaction.
- Earth structure:
  - Ground motion models at small R, high M.
  - Large shallow basins likely to be important.
- Site effects:
  - Very shallow structure.
  - Topography of material interfaces.

- Opportunities:

- Offshore instrumentation: OBS, SMART cables, DAS.
- ...
- Discussion today: 12:30-14:00, room C.3.16**

SMART cables  
(operations due 2027)  
Continent – Azores – Madeira



DAS (Madeira)

