

# Public and Private Space in Eighteenth Century Europe: The Example of Lisbon

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*A dominant theme of urban history is the history of the relationship between public and private space. The way both interconnected throughout History is a clear reflection of the development of societies, particularly with regard to the evolution of thinking.*

*The idea of public space as an outdoor and anonymous place, setting of informal and casual encounters, as we understand it today, emerged in eighteenth century Europe and, in the particular case of Portugal, became apparent in the rebuilding of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake. The same can be applied to the evolution of the concept of private space, in particular in its domestic expression. In Lisbon, the layout of house interiors suffered important changes responding simultaneously to demands of sociability and privacy.*

*Through the example of Lisbon, this paper will analyze the conceptual and physical formulations of public space and domestic space in connection with the secularization of society and the development of Enlightenment town planning ideas.*

## 1. From rural to urban: the relationship between communal and private areas in early modern Europe.

In medieval Europe, cities grew as economic, political or religious centres. As opposed to rural areas, they were first characterised by concentrating, in a restricted area, a significant percentage of the population. From the thirteenth century, the development of trade and the concurrent complexity of the political system strengthened this primary aspect of the city's physical and social nature. The demographic and building concentration and the diversity of the citizens' trades and occupations gave shape to a particular way of living. Urban life became, therefore, a fundamental social and cultural reference in European society.<sup>1</sup>

Surrounded by walls, acting as defensive and administrative devices, cities established, however, strong links with the neighbouring countryside. Large communal areas, outside the walled area, and the proliferation of vegetable patches and animal sheds in the medieval city centres were responsible for an urban mixed identity. Nevertheless, citizens and the rural population abided by different rules. This reality expressed another important element of European urban life: the innovative nature of the burgesses' status.

In the late medieval period, cities began to expand first horizontally and afterwards vertically. The expansion outside the walled precinct was a liability from both a defensive and an administrative point of view. Concurrently, the fast urbanization of the city centres increased sanitary and safety problems, as plagues, fires and criminality. New houses, stables and sheds were built on back yards, vegetable patches, and communal areas. The already existing urban maze became more complex, with precarious buildings obstructing public passages and communal areas. Building restrictive laws tried to restrain and control this trend having the protection of the existing, human and built, as the main objective.<sup>2</sup>

The location of the royal palaces and the concentration of artisans' shops in some areas began to demarcate the city centres. In addition, Palace courtyards, churchyards and communal areas (the latter often located outside the city walls) gave form to the first squares.<sup>3</sup> Opening the tight street maze, these gathering points were used for different purposes. Markets, religious events and public executions took place in these areas. Social interaction happened within this context.

In the city of the sixteenth century, the boundaries between the public and the private areas were still gaining shape. City councils fought to keep public areas free from illegal constructions. The idea of civic convenience and the concept of citizenship, as more than a legal status, became more apparent.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, in the narrow streets, overcrowded buildings developed vertically, with domestic space reduced to a minimum and in general directly connected to the workplace.

## 2. The city as a political and economic setting: the Renaissance and Baroque programmes.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ports and capital cities grew substantially. The European expansionist enterprise and the centralization of political power gave to these cities a leading role in society. They became cosmopolitan centres where different nationalities and races lived side by side, connected by trade and separated by

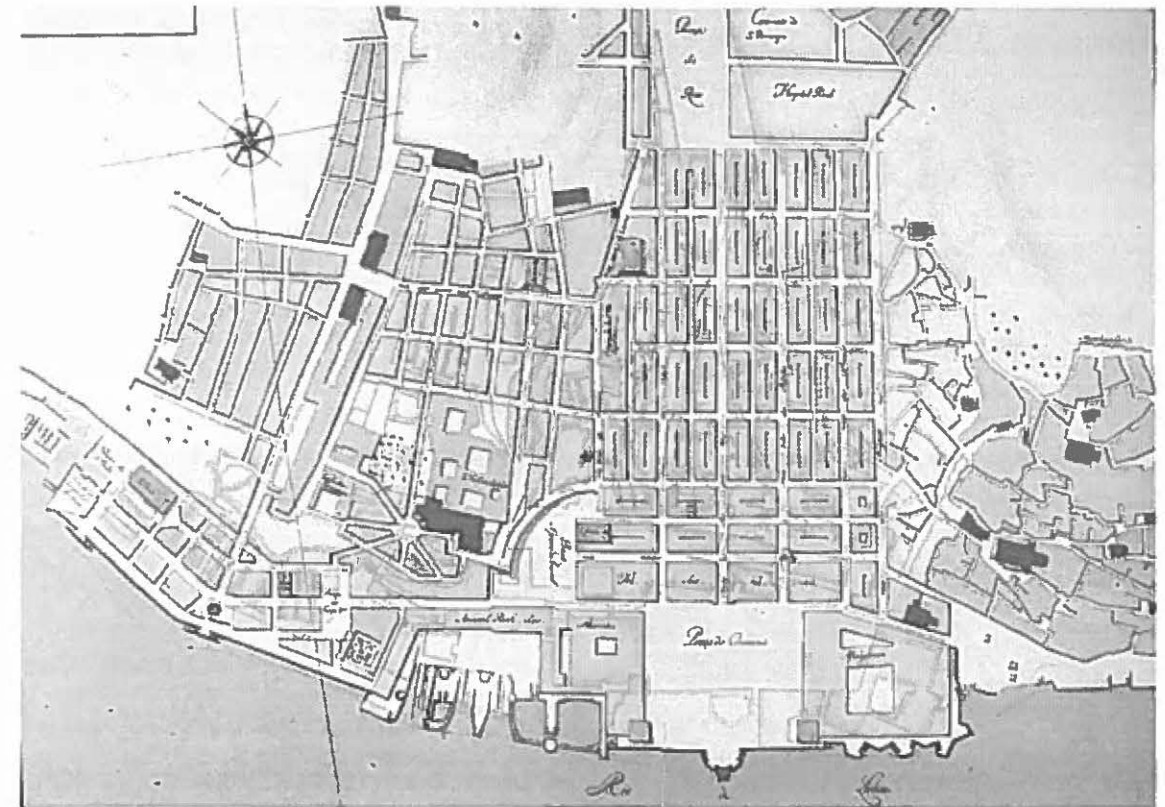


Fig. 1: Plan for the rebuilding of Lisbon, 1756

religion, language and culture.<sup>5</sup> The division between the rural and the urban landscape and the concurrent clash between both identities acquired an undeniable relevance.<sup>6</sup>

The transformations taking place set in motion a new approach to the idea of the city. In fact, the combination between urban management and the use of architecture as a political and social instrument gave form to a new understanding of the urban space.<sup>7</sup> Cities were planned, extended and re-ordered according to precepts of regularity, symmetry and uniformity. Absolutist power, with its State apparatus, and the increasing importance of commerce demanded an ordered and functional city. This trend was theoretically supported by architectural treatises, which promoted the use of standardized formulas. The Baroque city became simultaneously the stage of political and economic strategies. Monumental architectural settings and regular and spacious urban layouts provided the required scenario.<sup>8</sup>

Architectural units, which were able to develop new spatial dynamics, redefined urban space in Rome, Paris and Turin. In the first example, a scheme of new avenues tore the old maze using monumental architecture as a focal point. *Places Royales*, materialized by rows of uniform buildings, interrupted the medieval street layout of Paris. In fact, these geometric and closed spatial units performed as monuments.<sup>9</sup> The same town planning precepts were

responsible for the extension of Turin: large avenues connect monumental *piazas* according to a regular architectural and spatial layout.<sup>10</sup> The architectural classical heritage prevailed not only in the Classicism of the Parisian architecture but also in the Baroque programmes of Rome and Turin.

The representative character of architecture was evident. Urban space was no longer a collective asset.<sup>11</sup> It was redesigned to represent the new face of power, in both its political and economic dimensions. Public buildings and residential quarters reflected and generated a different social appropriation of the city ground.

However, theorists, authorities and building experts demanded a global approach to town planning. The Cartesian model of uniformity and regularity presupposed large-scale projects. In addition, the need to create operational urban infrastructures became evident. Monumental architecture could not *per se* give shape to an urban environment able to respond to the new social and economic challenges. The social component of the city gained an increasing significance.

## 3. The Enlightened City

The emphasis put upon the individuality and autonomy of Man by Humanism evolved to the Enlightenment

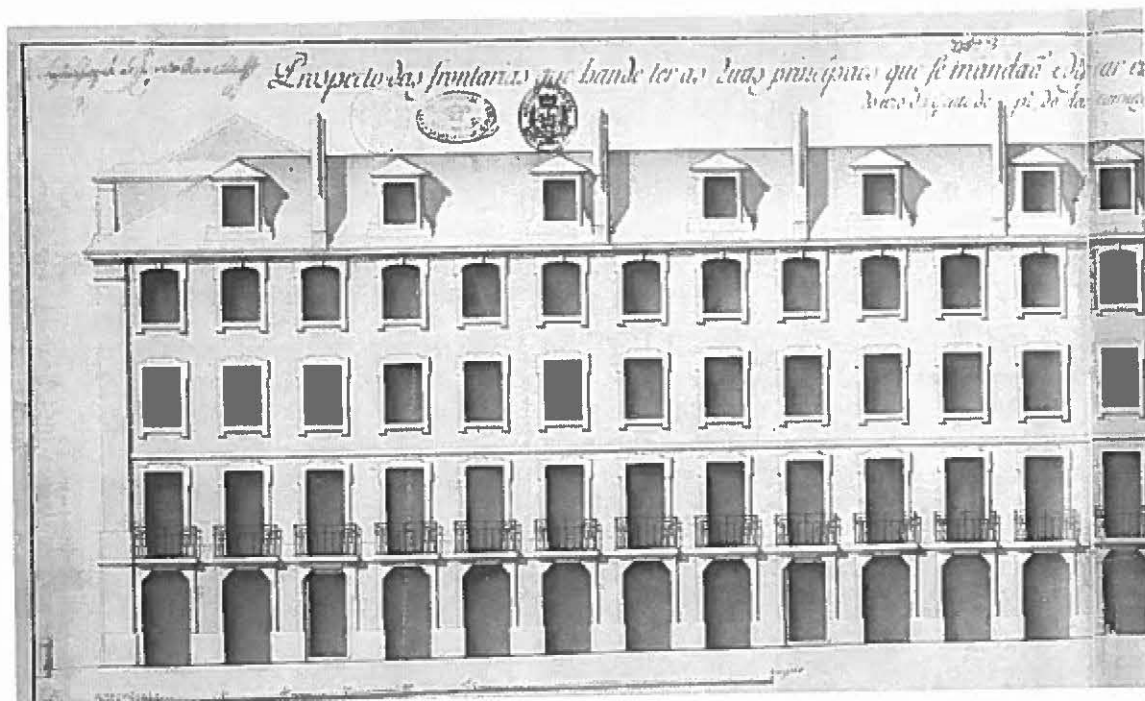


Fig. 2: Pombaline façade - main street

search for the *happiness of the people*. Humankind should be able to improve its living conditions according to a mental framework that considered progress as synonymous of contentment.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, architectural and town planning theorists, namely Pierre Patte and Jacques-François Blondel, discussed the issue of urban embellishment following modern concerns of social progress. According to Blondel, architecture should combine structure with appearance, ultimately envisaging its function in the city.<sup>12</sup> Patte gives, perhaps, one of the most enlightened definitions of this assertion: "If we consider architecture as a whole we perceive that ... we have looked always at the objects as masonry works, whereas they should have been envisaged through philosophy. This is why cities have not yet been suitably arranged for the well-being of its inhabitants; continuously, we are the victims of the same calamities, of the dirtiness, of the bad air and of an infinity of accidents that the harmony of a carefully combined plan would make disappear".<sup>13</sup> Laugier expresses the same view: "Most of our towns have remained in a state of neglect, confusion and disorder, brought about by the ignorance and boorishness of our forefathers. New houses have been built but neither the bad distributions of the streets nor the unsightly irregularity of the decorations, made at random and according to anybody's whim, are changed. Our towns are still what they were, a mass of houses crowded together haphazardly without system, planning, or design".<sup>14</sup>

The city was referred to as a conceptual entity. However, town planning thought envisaged a practical

resolution of the main problems that plagued European cities at the time. There was the conviction that the city needed to be addressed as a living place. Some of these concerns reveal already a hygienist approach to urban issues. This notion matured throughout the seventeenth century and by the mid-eighteenth century acquired a more precise sense: it became part of a wider problem that saw in the dirtiness of the streets, in the ill-construction of the houses and in the lack of open and green spaces a cause for public concern. The evolution of these ideas was obviously also linked to the contemporary scientific developments. The notion of city became, thus, the result of an array of elements which having as their basis, economic and social changes, incorporated philosophical and scientific premises.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, London, Paris, Lisbon, Berlin and Edinburgh, amongst other large European cities, were complex urban systems, expressing in their architectural component, urban equipments and infrastructures the emerging of new social values. The separation between royal residences and State buildings, the improvement of sanitary measures, the building of residential quarters, markets, fountains, public gardens, theatres and opera houses responded to middle class aspirations. Political, economic and social dealings required the availability of designed urban areas. Trade and sociability became correlated urban functions. The *Proposals for Carrying on certain Public works in the City of Edinburgh* (1752) sum up these ideas with precision: "Among the several causes to which the prosperity of a nation may be ascribed, the situation, conveniency, and beauty of its capital are surely not the least considerable. A

capital where these circumstances happen fortunately to concur, should naturally become the centre of trade and commerce, of learning and the arts, of politeness, and of refinement of every kind".

#### 4. Lisbon after 1755: the Great Earthquake and the rebuilding

The Great 1755 earthquake devastated Lisbon's city centre. The magnitude of the shocks, the tidal waves and a subsequent violent fire caused a scene of destruction that shocked European thought at the time. Following the Royal Family and the Court's example, Lisbon's citizens fled to the outskirts leaving behind chaos and ruins.

Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (b.1699 – d.1782), the Portuguese Secretary of War and Foreign Affairs, future Prime Minister (1756), Earl of Oeiras (1759) and Marquis of Pombal (1769) directed the rescue and rebuilding operations. In a major effort, Carvalho e Melo developed a comprehensive strategy that included a thorough questionnaire on the occurrence, which was sent to all parishes, a survey of the ruined properties,

an assessment of the health hazards impending on the city, a severe punishment of the rioters and a project for the rebuilding of the destroyed areas.

Soon after the catastrophe, Pombal appointed the elderly military engineer Manuel da Maia (b.1672 – d.1768) to conceive a project for the rebuilding. To this end, Manuel da Maia wrote a three-part text, the *Dissertação* (Dissertation), considering the main aspects of this enterprise: location of the new city; typology of the buildings; street layout; infrastructures to be developed and the selection of a reliable team of architects.

Lisbon's city centre was rebuilt on the same site, according to a plan devised by the military engineers Eugénio dos Santos (b.1711 – d.1760), and Carlos Mardel (b.1695 – d.1763). The plan shows a geometric grid between the pre-existing two main squares, *Rossio*, to the North and the *Terreiro do Paço* (Palace Courtyard), to the South, on the riverbank. Both squares were redesigned according to geometric precepts and were linked by a chequered street layout. The main and secondary streets are identifiable by their width and a few alterations on façades' design (a slight variation of the windows' frames) (Fig. 1). A team of

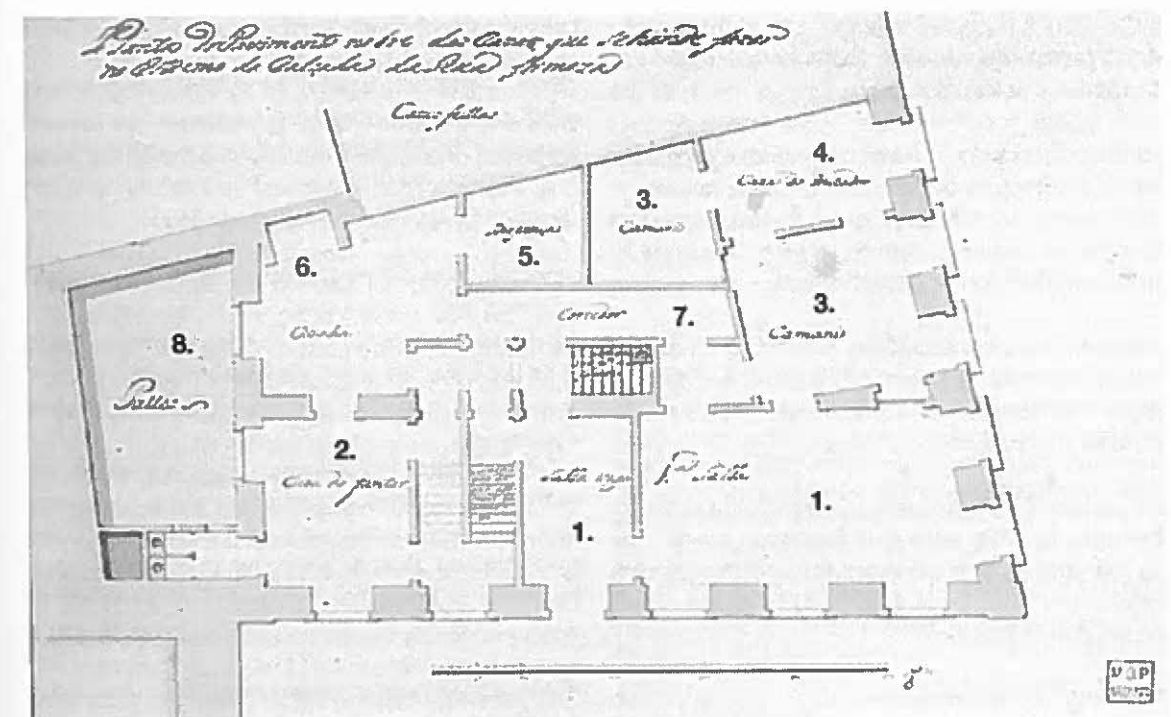


Fig. 3: Plan of the first floor of the houses to be built on Formosa Street



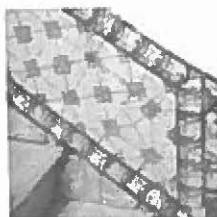


Fig. 4: Pombaline buildings: details of staircases

architects working at the *Casa do Risco* (Drawing House), an institution created by Pombal, assisted the whole rebuilding. From November 1755, a clear and systematic legislation was passed, which defined the layout and proceedings of the private rebuilding.<sup>15</sup>

The grid of the new plan extends itself on the city's downtown and the western adjacent districts of *S. Paulo* and *Chiado*. To the east, in an area less damaged by the earthquake, the rebuilding did not obey to a defined plan. Similarly, to the West, direction of the Lisbon's expansion at the time, and to the North, with the exception of the *Amoreiras* district, the urbanization did not follow a strict project and was left in the hands of the private initiative.

#### 4.1 Pombaline Lisbon: from home interiors to urban sociability

Pombal sought to modernize Portuguese society within the context of an *ancient régime* system. In other words, he aimed to open it to the progressive dynamic of trade and commerce without altering its political system and its social hierarchy.

However, Pombal needed the support of an elite of traders which he directly promoted. As a result, his policy was responsible for the emerging of the middle class as a structured social group.

As part of his political and economic strategies for Portugal, Pombal wanted a functional capital city. To this end, he developed a coercive town planning programme, which, however, relied financially mainly on the private initiative.

Following a seventeenth-century national trend, the pragmatism and sobriety of military engineering architectural and town planning proposals prevailed

in the rebuilding of Lisbon. These conformed to Enlightenment theories about the city. It was a large-scale project, with a regular geometric layout and standardized architectural formulas, ultimately envisaging urban utility. This idea of the city implied a particular attention given to sanitary problems, urban infrastructures (sewers, cleaning and lighting systems) and leisure and cultural equipments.

In Pombaline Lisbon, architecture was submitted to the urban design. Uniform buildings emphasise the intrinsic coherence of the ensemble. As a result, the plan for the rebuilding of Lisbon's city centre also developed new residential models. Although the buildings were projected as both residential and commercial units, the division between these two different areas was better defined. In addition, the layout of the home interiors suggested the search for a functional domestic space.

The Pombaline tenement (*Prédio de Rendimento Pombalino*) is supported by an innovative wooden anti-seismic structure (known as the *gaiola* – cage) and is structured in blocks with regular and sober façades. In general, develops vertically in five storeys: ground floor (usually occupied by shops); first floor, the noble area of the building, with French windows opening onto a balcony protected with an iron frame; two intermediate storeys and a loft storey (Fig. 2).

Originally, the whole building could be the owner's residence. More often, the owner's family occupied only the first floor, being the rest of the building allocated by apartment (two in each floor).

The interiors do not follow a unique plan. However, they clearly obey to a specific pattern. Usually a row of two or three large rooms open to the main façade and is connected to another row of inner chambers (which sometimes open to a second row of smaller chambers); there is often a corridor linking this area to the kitchen and the pantry. There are, thus, two main areas; the first for both social intercourse and domestic use (the chambers and antechambers) and a service area. The dining room is sometimes located in the service area, having an ambivalent usage (social and domestic). Of special notice, is the introduction in some plans of a new element, the corridor. The whole composition is also generally structured around an inner yard, used as a source of sunlight and a fire prevention element (Fig. 3). The building vestibule and staircase define the



Fig. 5: Pombaline building blocks

main boundaries between the public and the private space.<sup>16</sup>

Following a seventeenth century Portuguese trend, the use of tiles as an interior ornament prevails in these buildings: they cover the walls of vestibules, staircases and main rooms, in this case, particularly at a first floor level (Fig. 4).

The interiors' plans reflect also the different social occupation of these tenements. This variation occurs vertically, with loft storeys often used as the servants' quarters and first floors regarded as noble residences.<sup>17</sup>

The palaces or stately houses built after the earthquake show also a tendency for the functional use of its interiors, which became more complex. However, they point towards an intermediary stage, as the boundaries between public, semi-public and domestic space are often not clearly distinct.

Home inventories are also valuable elements of analysis. They confirm the transitional character of this period. Residences were built and equipped to simultaneously

portray a social status, maintain a family heritage and respond to new codes of domesticity and sociability.

These plans reveal family routines and lifestyles, and, as such, the social significance of the emerging domestic codes.

With the exception of some major Lisbon palaces, and following a tendency that we can trace back to the seventeenth century Portuguese *plain architecture* (18), the building of aristocratic and middle class residences followed a tenement typology, reinforcing an ambiguity between the concepts of palace, stately house and tenement. The Pombaline tenement, with its standardized façade and particular interior layout, gave a definite impetus to this trend. Picturing the pragmatic and empiricist character of the Pombaline rebuilding, these models became dominant in Lisbon for more than one century, conveying to the city an image of architectural sobriety (Fig. 5).

However, the Enlightenment principles that shaped Pombaline Lisbon are mainly visible in the concept of public space. In fact, the architectural setting is now presented as a unique public space, the structuring net of the various urban activities, seen both in its global and individual significance. The building of Lisbon's first public garden, the *Passeio Público* (1764 – architect: Reinaldo Manuel; demolished in 1882) at the North of *Rossio*, was a fundamental part of this project: it promoted civic interchange taking place separately from the sacred and royal festivities. Urban space was returned to its citizens, according however to a new set of values and social codes.

#### NOTES TO THE FIGURES

Fig. 1. Plan for the rebuilding of Lisbon (1756). Captain Eugénio dos Santos e Carvalho. This is a later version of the original plan, which was amended by Eugénio dos Santos and Carlos Mardel. Inscription: "Planta topográfica da Cidade de Lisboa arruinada também Segundo o novo Alinhamento dos Architectos Eugénio dos Santos e Carlos Mardel". ("Topographic Plan of the ruined City of Lisbon according also to the new Alignment made by the Architects Eugénio dos Santos Carvalho and Carlos Mardel"). Drawing by João Pinto Ribeiro. Etching (china ink) with pink and yellow watercolour wash.

Dims: 1189x764 mm.

Copy of the original kept in the Instituto Geográfico Português (Lisbon).

Fig. 2. Pombaline façade - Main Streets. Inscription: "Prospecto das frontarias que han-de ter as ruas principaes que se mandão edificar em Lixboa baixa arruinada e se dividem com culunelos para separação do uso da gente de pé do das carruagens" ("View of the façades of the main streets which are to be built in the ruined downtown of Lisbon, divided with little columns in order to separate the pedestrian area from the carriages"). Signed by Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo and Eugénio dos Santos e Carvalho. Published in França, José-Augusto, *Lisboa Pombalina e o Iluminismo*. 3rd edition. Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 1983.

Etching (china ink) with watercolour wash.

Dims: 100,5x33,5 cm.

Published in Cartulário Pombalino, Departamento de Património Cultural, Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa (Lisboa, 1999). Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa.

Fig. 3 "Planta do Pavimento nobre das cazas que se hande fazer no extremo da calçada da Rua Formosa" ("Plan of the first floor of the houses to be built on Formosa Street"), 1772, signed by the Marquis of Pombal. Arquivo Histórico do Ministério das Obras Públicas.

1. Front room
2. Dining-room
3. Chamber
4. Ante-chamber
5. Pantry
6. Kitchen
7. Corridor
8. Yard

Fig. 4 Pombaline buildings: detail of staircases. (Published in Monumentos, no 21, Setembro 2002)

Fig. 5 Pombaline building blocks: detail.

#### NOTES TO THE TEXT

1. See Calabi, Donatella, *Il Mercato e la città. Piazze, strade, architetture d'Europa in età moderna*. Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1993 (English translation: *The Market and the City*. London: Ashgate, 2004), p. 37: In the period 1450-1650, all over Europe, the flow of people around the urban centres caused a noteworthy social instability, within a context of political tension.

2. This was the case of Queen Elizabeth's Proclamation of 1580, in England. Although its purpose was to stop uncontrolled building in order to prevent a further chaotic urban environment, it still shows a concern with the medieval status of the burgesses.

3. In Portugal, the *Rossios*, fair grounds linking the cities to the countryside, became main squares. On the relationship between marketplaces and the evolution of the early modern city planning see Calabi, Donatella, *op. cit.*

4. Calabi, Donatella, *idem*, p. 37: "All over Europe, it seems that we witness a process of modernization of public areas, which consists most of all of a more conscientious connection between open spaces (used as a passageway or for leisure)

and a more clear definition of their boundaries".

5. In 1600, Paris, Milan, Venice, Naples, Palermo, London and Lisbon were the largest cities in Europe, with more than 100,000 inhabitants (Vries, Jan de, "Patterns of urbanization in pre-industrial Europe 1500-1800" *Patterns of Urbanization since 1500*. Ed. H. Schmal. London: Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 77-109). Lisbon was from the late fifteenth century a capital city and an important trade centre, managing an extensive long-distance commerce. As such, it represented a powerful focus of attraction to the countryside population as well as to foreign traders. Sixteenth century Lisbon depicts, therefore, an early image of London from the late seventeenth century: see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986, p. 48: "the stranger as an unknown can dominate, however, the perceptions of people who are unclear about their own identities, losing traditional images of themselves, or belonging to a new social group that as yet has no clear label".

6. See Borsay, Peter, *The English urban renaissance: culture and society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 4. The shift produced in the late seventeenth century in the relationship between urban centres and the adjoining countryside highlights the major changes taking place: "the close physical and economic proximity of the countryside", in the case of commercial towns (a legacy of the medieval burghs), or the degree of administrative authority of the regional and provincial centres were slowly being replaced by "an urban system defined more by the economic and social function of its members than by their external influence".

7. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Lisbon knew an early example of this assertion. King D. Manuel, who was leading a pioneer expansionist project, moved the Royal Palace from the Castle Hill to a large square facing the river Tagus. This decision was a vital part of an extensive programme of urban rearrangement of Lisbon, which was carried out from 1498. The first stage of the programme also included the refurbishment and the construction of a number of city council public buildings and urban infrastructures, such as fountains and quays, the enlargement of the busiest gates of the city and the improvement of the cleaning system (see Carita, Helder, *Lisboa Manuelina e a Formação de Modelos Urbanísticos da Época Moderna (1495-1521)*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1999).

8. See Argan, G. C., *L'Europe des Capitales 1600-1700*. Genève: Skira-Fabri, 1965 and *The Renaissance City*. New York: George Brazillier, 1969.

9. See Harouel, Jean-Louis, *L'Embellissement des Villes (L'Urbanisme Français au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle)*. Paris: Picard Editeur, 1993; Cleary, Richard L., *The Place Royale and Urban Design in the Ancien Régime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 and Gaby, Alexandre and Montclos, Jean-Marie Pérouse de (ed.), *De L'Esprit des Villes: Nancy et l'Europe urbaine au siècle des Lumières, 1720-1770*. Versailles. Éditions Artlys, 2005.

10. Pollak, Martha D. - *Turin 1564-1680*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

11. Sennett, Richard, *op. cit.*, who refers to the 18<sup>th</sup> century square as "a monument to itself" (p. 54), which is particularly

true in the case of Louis XIV's *places royals*, also stresses the fact that both in Paris and London these new open areas were not anymore a "place of multiple use, of meeting and observing" (p.55), and that "the crowd life of the city was now fragmented and dispersed" (p. 54).

12. Blondel, Jacques-François, *Architecture Française*. 4 vols. Paris : 1752-1756.

--- *Cours d'architecture ou traité de la Décoration, Distribution & Construction des Bâtimens*. 9 vols. Paris : 1771-1777.

13. Patte, Pierre, *Mémoires sur les objets les plus importantes de l'Architecture*. Paris : 1769.

14. Laugier, Marc-Antoine, *Essai sur l'Architecture*. Paris: Nicolas-Bonaventure Duchesne, 1753, Preface, xxxiv.

15. See França, José-Augusto, *Lisboa Pombalina e o Iluminismo*. 3rd Edition. Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 1983 and Murteira, Helena, "City-Making in the Enlightenment: the rebuilding of Lisbon after the earthquake of 1755" *Edinburgh Architecture Research*, vol. 29 (2004), pp. 19-23.

16. See Barreiros, Maria Helena - "Casas em cima de casas. Apontamentos sobre o espaço doméstico da Baixa Pombalina" *Monumentos - Revista da Direcção de Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais*, nº 21, Setembro 2004, pp. 88-89.

17. See Madureira, Nuno - *Cidade: espaço e quotidiano*. Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1992.

18. Kubler, George, *Portuguese Plain Architecture - Between Spices and Diamonds*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1972.